My Little Sister
Can Read
漢字
KANJI
2
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"I FEEL LIKE I'VE SEEN YOUR FACE SOMEWHERE BEFORE, TELL ME YOUR NAME-NODA."
"GIN IMOSE."
WHEN I SAID MY NAME, SHE MADE A FACE LIKE, "OHO!"
"GIN IMOSE...
NO, THAT'S JUST TOO MUCH OF A COINCIDENCE..."
(CH. 2 THE TRUTH OF THE SITUATION)

※Some artistic liberties may have been taken in this illustration.
AN UNFATHOMABLE BEING...
HIS HATRED OF THE ORTHODOX STYLE MADE HIM PERVERT THE TRUE FUTURE!
THE OMINOUS FIGURE OF THE TRUE ENEMY REVEALS HIMSELF!

THE VOICE OF A FEMALE ANNOUNCER CAME THROUGH MY PHONE'S SPEAKER.
"-THIS IS THE GAI ODAIRA HOUR, BROUGHT TO YOU BY TOYODA!"
IT WAS ODAIRA-SENSEI'S RADIO PROGRAM.
(CH. 6 THE FUTURE - FUTURE - ☆※□)

Dear People of the 21st Century,

This book is a retitled and translated edition of *LILSIS READ KANJI 2* (by Gin Imose), which was published in the 23rd century. This translation is not literal, and it has been adjusted in order to be more easily readable by 21st century readers.

Furthermore, in order for the reader to gain a deeper understanding of the literary and social culture of the 23rd century, I have included translated excerpts from the literary magazine *Literary Gal*. Please keep in mind that these passages from *Literary Gal* are not presented in their original text, but rather through my interpretive translation.

Now, I would like to give my warmest thanks to the original author, Mr. Gin Imose, as well as the publisher of *Literary Gal*, Hoggy Japan, Inc., and all the other people involved in the creation of this work. You all have my utmost gratitude and appreciation.

Chapter 1 - School Days

My little sister can read kanji. And that's really quite amazing.

...Actually, no, it's not.

A future Japan in which kanji are no longer used? If you were to think rationally, there is no way for such a thing to happen. It is just unrealistic to believe that Japanese could be expressed only with kana letters and symbols.

So, let's get real here.

In 23rd century Japan, it's not merely kanji which are no longer used in Japan, it's Japanese itself! Japan is now an English only country. English has become the official language of all countries around the world, and Japan is no exception. Japanese was driven out mercilessly by the invading English, and the old Japanese of Japan has disappeared.

Therefore, I think it best to restart this work with the appropriate setting:

"My Little Sister Can Read English."

From now on, I will be writing my monologue in English, as well.

SOUIUWAKEDESUNODE DOUKA GORIKAIONEGAISHIMASU. (I humbly request your cooperation.)

"—Onii-chan, what are you muttering about?"

My sister's rude question interrupted my train of thought. *Ahhh, what is it? I was just about to have an interesting idea...*

"I was figuring out an idea for my new book," I replied.

"New book? Wait, it's not *that* one? You're gonna write something different again?"

"No, no, *that* one is my life's work. This is a different one."

Walking next to me was a girl with long, shiny, black hair. She seemed more mature than her 16 years of age with her well-proportioned body and precisely

structured face. She was carrying a dictionary with her, which lent her an intellectual air.

She was the elder of my two little sisters, Kuroha.

Brother and sister, we climbed the gentle slope toward the 21st century high school which stood on the top of the hill. But, we were not alone.

“Oh, Gin-san, are you writing another novel? When it is done, please let me read it!”

The blonde-haired girl with the calm voice gave me a warm smile. She was extremely beautiful, and her eyes gave off an expression of kindness. Everything about her was lovable.

She was Yuzu-san, a beautiful girl from the 21st century who I had met.

I was in the middle, and I was walking with Kuroha to my right and Yuzu-san to my left.

“My new work will be written entirely in English and take place in Japan. Don’t you think it will be a refreshing setting?” I explained.

“Oh, my! You mean Japan has become the U.S.? If that’s the case, then should I have been cooking meals that Americans would like?” Yuzu asked curiously.

“Is it really that improbable a setting? If English continues to spread, couldn’t you see it actually happening in the far future?” commented Kuroha.

Yuzu-san and Kuroha had completely different reactions to my idea.

“I’m going to title my new work ‘&.’” I wrote the title on the palm of my hand and showed it to them.

“Maybe I don’t need to ask, but what does it mean?” asked Kuroha. “If it’s you, Onii-chan, then probably...”

“It’s a little girl sitting indian-style in gym class.”

“Figures,” she replied, as if hoping for some other answer.

“Um... Which part is the head and which part is the rear-end?” asked Yuzu-san.

Kuroha looked exasperated, and Yuzu-san tilted her head a little.

“Hey, Kuroha. There’s one thing I’d like to ask you about,” I said.

“What is it?” she asked.

“What does this title have to do with an English-only Japan?”

“How the hell would I know? Ask that bone in your head you call a brain!” Kuroha hadn’t been in a good mood since this morning.

As we talked, the front gate to the school came into view. On it was written “私立白明学園,” which I had figured out meant the name of our school. I wasn’t able to read it myself, but Kuroha and Yuzu-san had taught me how.

“Yuzu-san, what is today’s date and year again?”

“June 27th, 201X.”

“I see. In that case...” We had already been in the 21st century for a week. In order to return the culture of the 23rd century to what it was, we had come straight back to the 21st century.

In the real 23rd century Japan, the city streets were overflowing with moe, and kanji were no longer used in written Japanese. The great author, Kurona Gura, had written a moe novel called *Oniaka* (*I Want to Have Onii-chan’s Baby*), which had had a tremendous impact on all culture.

Of course we enjoyed the blessings of such an abundant moe culture, but some individual had stolen the manuscript to a work we had written in the 21st century called *Ani MAJI Mania (Crazy for Big Brother)*, which would become the basis for *Oniaka.* Having lost the spark that would inspire him, Gura did not write *Oniaka*, and instead published a book called *Seishin (The Stars)*, which had vanishingly few moe aspects to it and used a considerable amount of kanji.

Effectively, the future had changed from the *Oniaka* route to the *Seishin* route. The moe had disappeared from the city, and kanji were in daily use. The culture was much closer to the Japan of the past.

Our goal was to prevent *Seishin* from changing the world by stopping the manuscript of *Ani MAJI Mania* from being stolen, but...

“Onii-chan, you have this serious look on your face,” pointed out Kuroha. “That’s rare.”

“Yeah. I was just thinking about how we’re in a bind.”

Kuroha’s expression clouded up. “It’s true that the situation is pretty dire, but there’s sure to be a solution. Don’t go giving up!”

“I’m not giving up. Of course not.”

To sum it up, we were in big trouble. Let me explain in chronological order.

When we traveled back in time once again, an unexpected thing occurred. We had originally planned to return to Yuzu-san’s house, but right before we time traveled, we all started talking about how we wanted to go to a resort and relax. So instead of ending up at our destination, we arrived at a resort somewhere in the Kanto area.

At first we weren’t sure what was going on, but since we were at a resort, we decided to relax for a bit. However, Odaira-sensei snuck his way into a “kiddie swimming lesson class” and caused a giant ruckus, so we weren’t able to stay for long.

After that, we headed to Yuzu-san’s house, but when we arrived, the manuscript for *Ani MAJI Mania* had already been stolen. We had no other choice, so I ate another marshmallow in order to time travel once again. I figured we would move to a time before it was stolen.

But, nothing happened.

Eating the marshmallows no longer caused us to travel through time!

Unable to accomplish our goal, we were now trapped in the Heisei era...

“So, we don’t have *Ani MAJI Mania*, and we can’t eat the marshmallows to travel through time...” said Kuroha, biting her lip. “I bet if the person who did this were secretly watching us, they’d be clapping their hands in joy.”

“Um, perhaps I should just write another copy of *Ani MAJI Mania*?” suggested Yuzu-san.

“Yuzu-san, can you write the same thing a second time?” I asked, and Yuzu-san replied with a grin.

“Nope, not a chance!”

I knew it!

Ani MAJI Mania had been handwritten, and we didn't have a copy of it in data form. It had already been quite a while since it was written, so it would have been difficult to write the same thing again.

We had been backed into a corner, and everyone was screwing their heads trying to figure out what to do. We all puzzled over it.

But we couldn't find any way to resolve the situation.

Of course, we didn't just give up so easily on a way to return to the future. *I'm gonna go back to the future and become an author!*

But we had nothing to go on, and no matter how hard we thought, we couldn't come up with a plan... Therefore, rather than just sitting with our heads in our hands, we had decided to seriously continue living our lives in this time period, and we were once again starting to attend school.

Yuzu-san smiled brightly at Kuroha and me, trying to cheer us up. "But at least I can go to school together with you two again! How fun!"

We could see the school in front of us. The arriving students were all being sucked through the gate. I stopped and looked up at the ancient-looking school building across the school grounds.

Kuroha and I were people from the 23rd century, but we had gone to this school before. Yuzu-san's family was rich, and using that influence, we had transferred in. It hadn't been even ten days since we had disappeared from the 21st century, so we were still enrolled.

"Onii-chan, I'm begging you, please don't embarrass us any more this time," said Kuroha.

She was referring to how I had already become quite a *legend,* apparently. *I think becoming the talk of the school is something to be proud of.*

"Okay. For now, let's go back to spreading moe at this school," I said. "I regret not being to do a performance in front of a full school assembly, so I'll make that my first goal!"

"Argh! Why do you always take what I say and decide the complete

opposite?!”

“Oh, I know! At the school assembly I can ask, ‘Is there anyone here who knows how to travel through time?’ There are so many students, maybe there’s one who can give us a clue!”

“I told you not to talk about how we’re from the future, remember?! You’re the one who needs to get a clue, Onii-chan!” Kuroha bopped me with the dictionary she was carrying.

Hey, that’s not a proper use for a dictionary!

Yuzu-san was watching us, and let out a little laugh. “It’s funny watching you two. You really are a pair.”

“You think? Well, we are brother and sister,” I said.

“You’ve spent a long time together with each other. Do you go to the same school in the future, too?”

“Yes. But I’m one year ahead of her.”

“What is school like in the future?”

“Well, you see...” As Yuzu-san asked me the question, the memories began to bubble up.

I remembered my school days in the 23rd century. It was quite different from school in the 21st century. The school was—

I’m pretty sure that the feel of a classroom before class begins hasn’t changed over the ages.

Looking around the chattering classroom bathed in the morning sunlight everyone was a little groggy, but doing whatever they wanted. Talking with friends, half-asleep passed out on their desk, studying up on the class subject... or whipping out their girlfriend to talk to.

“Sorry! I know it’s my fault! But I just can’t choose, I love you both so much!!” cried a teary-eyed boy in the center of the classroom.

It was the most popular kid in class, Sugawara-kun. He had placed two

postcards with illustrations of pretty girls on his desk, and was repeatedly bowing his head to them.

In other words, his two-timing had been found out.

Well, that was the scenario, it seemed. A power player like Sugawara-kun could enjoy a realistic situation like that kind of horror show. In the current-day, the number of men who had 2D girlfriends or wives had increased.

THINK NOW, 2D LOVE OR 3D LOVE?

This was the title of the book that the boy sitting behind Sugawara-kun, Tanaka-kun, was reading. Having a 2D lover was so commonplace now that books with that kind of title were being published. The heroine of *Oniaka*, Homyura, had been my first love, and she was 2D. But if I were to get a girlfriend, I thought it would be best for her to be 3D. It would have been lonely to date someone who I couldn't hold hands with.

And then...

Boioioing!

The bell rung that signaled the start of class. With a little electronic whine, the small displays on each of our desks came on. They showed a picture of a cute anime character. It was our class's 2D homeroom teacher Kazoe-sensei.

Kazoe-sensei looked basically like Homyura from *Oniaka*. Since each student was able to adjust the appearance and outfit to his or her taste, I had used the character builder to customize Kazoe-sensei to look just like Homyura.

"I-It's not like I want to start class or anything, okay?" she said.

Since you could choose her personality and speaking style, I had chosen "classical tsundere."

"Sensei, please don't say that. I'd like to start class," I said kindly, speaking into the microphone that was underneath the display. My Kazoe-sensei wasn't honest with herself, so it would take her a little bit to actually start class. *Well, I suppose that's a good thing.*

"If you insist, I guess I could start class. But it's not like I'm doing it just for you, got it?!"

“But you’re the only one who can start class for me, Kazoe-sensei. You’re the only one I can count on.”

“Fine, I know! I just have to start class, right? See if I care!”

Kazoe-sensei disappeared. Every morning as class began, it would show the customary opening animation.

With a scene of the teachers coming to school, the female singer KIRA would sing, “You won’t find true love at schooooooool,” our school song. It’s a good song, so I would sing along with it in a loud voice. “Find true love at schooooooool!”

When the opening was over, Kazoe-sensei appeared on the screen once again. Class had finally begun.

“First subject is civics. If you feel like answering, well, I guess I can’t stop you.”

Civics, huh? I’m pretty good at that subject.

ひゃがい

The display showed a question.

3 BIG ATTRIBUTES WHICH INFLUENCE JAPAN GOVERNMENT CULTURE ART ARE... (The three major attributes which have had the greatest influence on Japan's government, culture, and art are...)

What a simple question! There isn't a single person in current-day Japan which doesn't know the three major attributes!

"Little Sister, Big Sister, Childhood Friend!" I answered confidently.

CLOSE.

That was what was shown on the display in big letters. *H-Huh?*

A picture of a girl in a miniskirt was shown immediately afterward, and a gust of air blew up from below. For just a brief moment the skirt began to flip upward, but the girl used her hand and held it down.

CLOSE, indeed.

What I had just been shown was a reward video. Each student could choose their favorite reward video genre, and I had set mine to "panty flash."

"This is why I don't like stupid people, see?" scolded Kazoe-sensei. "I told you that it was a civics question, remember? Listen to the entire question before you answer! The three major attributes which have had the greatest influence on Japan's government, culture, and art are 'Little Sister, Big Sister, Childhood Friend,' but the current three largest political parties are what?"

Oops, my bad.

The correct answer was the "Little Sister Party," the "Big Sister Party," and the "Childhood Friend Party," exactly the same as the attributes. For your information, the largest party in Japan was the "Little Sister Party." Every 2D prime minister in history had been a little sister, and that was because, for the past 30 years, the "Little Sister Party" had held the reigns of political power.

"And here is a follow-up question that's good to know. The three major attributes are the standard, but there is another which is said to trump all three. Do you have any idea what I'm talking about, dummy?"

“Uh, no?”

“Mother.”

“What? Are you talking about, like, your real mom?”

“Man, you are so stupid! I suppose I should have said motherly instinct. Throughout history, the most popular heroines have all had a motherly instinct.”

Oh...? Really? Then maybe the next heroine I write about should have a motherly instinct. Maybe that can serve as a source of inspiration. My mom complains to me a lot, but she’s calm and nice to me, as well. I can make my heroine like that.

“Next, history!” Kazoe-sensei cried.

Okay! I’m gonna get this one right and see me some panties!

AKECHI MITSUHIDE→ HONNOUJI INCIDENT WHY?

Oh yeah, didn’t they find some new evidence or something lately that proved his motivation...?

Everyone else was asked the same question, and I could hear their various answers coming from around the classroom.

“Nobunaga chose the wrong response, which lowered Mitsuhide’s affection stat!”

“It was because they couldn’t agree whether ‘Pretty girls who recently transferred in from another school’ or ‘Always been by your side childhood friends’ were better!”

“Mitsuhide was pissed at Nobunaga because he forgot to record his anime, and he was jealous of him!”

Yes, those answers are all pretty convincing. But none of them seem like they are correct to me.

Sugawara-kun seemed to be shocked when he got his answer wrong, and he had taken out his 2D girlfriends to console him.

Man, I wish I had a girlfriend...

Now then, I must answer this question myself. Hmm... To force the death of

one's lord like that, they must had really been arguing over something fundamental... Something that they could just never see eye-to-eye on, no matter what...

Ah! I know!

"Because they couldn't agree whether *jitsumai* (blood-related little sisters) or *gimai* (non blood-related little sisters) were better!"

It has to be this!

It wasn't.

D'oh!

A girl appeared on the screen in a miniskirt, but no wind blew at all. The girl glared toward me looking irritated, then disappeared.

"That's your 30th wrong answer, you know," said Kazoe-sensei coldly.

Oh, crap! In my school, if you got 30 questions wrong, you had to receive a penalty. Kazoe-sensei continued to announce my punishment without any expression.

"After school today, you will have supplemental lessons. The subject will be Art History. You must memorize the names of 30 titles of historical gal games."

I hung my head in shame. *Oh, no... Today's the day the new* Literary Gal *comes out, and I wanted to get home early...*

As I began to feel down, Kazoe-sensei chimed in. "What's with that face? I-I guess I'll stay with you after school, so just cheer up already, sheesh!"

"You will?" I asked.

"I-It's not like I'm doing it for you, okay? It's just my duty as a teacher is all! Fine, see if I care!"

As Kazoe-sensei blurted this out, her cheeks got a little flushed, and then she disappeared.

I was silent.

She wouldn't appear again for a little while. She was set up to do this once in while. It didn't exactly make class go any faster.

“...And that’s what school is like, Yuzu-san,” I finished.

“Well, that sounds like a lot of fun. If there was a cooking class, I’d like to try taking it,” she said.

“You always did have way more experience with after school lessons than the average person, Onii-chan,” Kuroha commented.

As the three of us chatted, we entered the school building. I had been telling Yuzu-san about the various ins and outs of school in the 23rd century. At a later date, the words of a certain individual would make me think of those days once again.

The classes at the 21st century high school were just as difficult as I remembered them. The teacher was an actual human being, which just seemed off to me. I missed Kazoe-sensei. However, the culture in the 23rd century had completely changed, so there probably weren’t any 2D teachers there, either. We had to fix that, quickly. If only I were able to travel through time, I would be able to do something, but...

It was no use just lamenting, so that evening we all had a meeting to plan our next move. Myself, Kuroha, Yuzu-san, as well as two little girls, one with blonde twin-tails and one wearing a cat-eared beret, all gathered in the living room.

The blonde girl was the great author of the orthodox literary style, Gai Odaira. He was actually a 70-year-old gentleman, but because of a side effect of the time-traveling marshmallows, he had been transformed into a little girl. When asked if he had an interest in turning back to his original form, he had replied, “Not in the slightest.” This was surely due to his desire to know what it felt like to be a girl, to use for his writing.

The girl wearing the beret with cat-ears was my younger little sister Miru. In her case, she didn’t just look like a ten-year-old girl, but actually was one. Miru had placed a sketchbook on the floor and was sitting like a girl silently drawing.

“Something smells good...” said Odaira-sensei as he came into the room, smelling the air.

“...Oh my. But I haven’t started making dinner yet, you know?” replied Yuzu-

san, tilting her head a little.

“Yuzu-kun, what are you saying? When I say something smells good, I must be referring to the sweet scent of that blue fairy sitting over there!” said Odaira-sensei, clearly excited and pointing to Miru, still absorbed in her drawing.

Whether Miru didn’t notice or was completely ignoring him, either way she gave no hint of a response.

That’s Miru for you! Always doing things at her own pace.

“I won’t tell you exactly which parts I smell. On second thought, I will. Under the arms, between the fingers, the belly button, behind the knees...”

“How focused of you, Sensei!” I cried. “Are you saying it’s important for works to have a unique point of view to them? I understand! I’ll try licking the space between a girl’s fingers from now on!”

“Cut it out, you pervs!” yelled Kuroha, swinging the dictionary she was carrying in a wide arc. Odaira-sensei and I deftly dodged.

Having missed, Kuroha put the dictionary back under her arm much like a samurai putting their sword back in its scabbard.

“You are always carrying around a dictionary, aren’t you? You must be very focused on your studies,” I said. Since we had come back to the 21st century, Kuroha had started to always carry a dictionary with her.

“It’s not like I’ve given up returning to the future, but if you think about the situation we’re in, it’s important that I completely master the vocabulary for this time period. Just in case, I think you should also learn the skills you will need to survive in the 21st century, Onii-chan.”

“The skills I need? I totally agree with you, but what should I do to learn them?” I asked, craning my neck.

“Oh, I know! How about we play make-believe where you are at work?” suggested Yuzu-san helpfully.

Roleplaying where I am doing a job? Sounds like fun!

“That sounds like a good idea. Yuzu-kun, you be the boss, and we can practice acting like employees,” said Odaira-sensei.

“This sounds fun! I wanna play, too,” chimed in Miru.

So now the three of us were all raring to go, but Kuroha didn’t look so enthused.

“Make-believe? We’re not little kids, you know... Well, I guess I can’t stop you. What are you going to do, exactly?”

“Yuzu-san is our boss, so that means we have to follow her orders, right?” I asked.

“So, I need to decide what I want you to do...” said Yuzu-san, and after thinking for a bit she announced her clear intention: “I want to tie you up, like I used to do with my brother.”

Well, that’s a surprise. Tie me up?

“Is that... practicing for work, somehow?” asked Kuroha, her eyes wide in disbelief.

“I suspect this would be practice not for our jobs, but for Yuzu-kun’s,” explained Odaira-sensei.

I had heard from Yuzu-san once that she had always tied up her late brother when she played “Little Piggy” with him.

“What happens when I get tied up?” I asked her.

“You warp.”

“I warp?!”

“My brother would often yell out ‘I’m going to warp! I’m going to warp!’ and then his eyes would roll to the back of his head and he would sort of foam at the mouth, so I always thought he was warping to some other world.”

Hold on a sec! Warp? Could this be the same kind of thing as our time travel?

“When we played ‘Little Piggy,’ I would tie up my brother all the time. I don’t want to forget those times...”

“Yuzu-san, I guess you had some peculiar kinks awakened in you. Your brother clearly wasn’t so innocent...” pointed out Kuroha.

“Yes, your brother was most definitely someone with refined tastes,” summed

up Odaira-sensei.

“Indeed, he was very refined,” agreed Yuzu-san, smiling with a slightly sad look on her face. I was sure she was remembering her departed brother.

Don’t make that face, Yuzu-san! I want you to smile and laugh!

“Please, tie me up!” I cried reflexively.

I might find out the trick to time traveling! If I manage to time travel, we can solve our problems and return to the future!

Yuzu-san nodded at me with a full-faced smile, and immediately started to tie me up with a rope.

Um, where exactly did that rope come from?

“Please, think of me like your brother,” I told her.

“Gin-san, why do you always say these things that make me so happy? Thank you so much. I’m gonna do this all the way!” Yuzu-san declared so happily that tears began to well up in her eyes.

...A chill rolled up and down my spine.

My body was bent back like a shrimp, and both my arms were tied behind my back. I couldn’t move at all.

“You know what you’re doing,” remarked Odaira-sensei.

“After I started tying up my brother, I got more and more passionate about it. I practiced a whole lot, you see. The fundamentals are very important.”

I see. The fundamentals are important for writing novels, too. Well, for pretty much anything.

After my entire body was bound tight, hand and foot, she finally put a rope around my neck. The pressure made it feel like I couldn’t even breathe.

“Gin-san, I’m sorry, but I think the ropes are still too loose,” she told me.

“Um, actually I think they’re pretty tight already...”

“This is not tight at all!” she declared.

Yuzu-san, do I see something different in your eyes? Something... dazzling?

“Until I tighten the ropes, it’s not complete, you see,” she explained.

“What’s not complete?”

“The technique.”

“And what happens when the technique is complete?”

“The ropes around your body will all constrict at the same time, Gin-san.”

“And then, I’ll... warp, is it? I’ll be okay, r-right?”

“It’s a gamble.”

“Hey, did you just say something really ominous?” I yelped.

“My brother gambled and won, so it should be fine.”

Kuroha had been watching with her usual exasperated expression, but she was now starting to look worried. “H-Hey, Yuzu-san... Are you sure he’ll be okay? You’re not going to turn him into a bigger weirdo than he already is, right?”

“It’ll be fine. If something happens to him, I’ll take responsibility and care for him,” said Yuzu-san, taking the rope coming off of my body in her hands. I could tell she was gripping the rope very tightly.

“What? Yuzu-san, what do you mean, care for him? You mean always stay by his side?! Don’t tell me you and him have already...”

Kuroha was clearly uneasy. Out of the corner of my eye, I could see Miru with her hands placed together, chanting “Namu.”

I did not have the time to consider the meaning of what she was saying. Why? Because my consciousness had already warped...

Perhaps it was a dream, but I was back in school in the 23rd century. I was walking down the hallway with the first year classrooms, going to meet Kuroha. Kuroha was in first year class △... *There it is.*

I looked at first year class △ through the window from the hallway. I could see some boy in the row closest to me reading a magazine. The magazine cover had the headline “POPULAR BOY → READ GAI ODAIRA.” It seemed like a special issue.

A devotee of Odaira such as myself was not happy with people reading his

books for some pithy reason like being popular. Odaira-sensei's books were the pinnacle of *hentai* literature, not some tool to make yourself look better.

I don't like it. Maybe I'll give him a piece of my mind.

I opened the window with a clatter. "Hey, you! Don't go reading Odaira-sensei's books because of a reason like that!"

"...Huh?" The boy who had been reading the magazine looked up in surprise.

"You have to read Odaira-sensei's books with pure feelings in your heart! If you truly want to read Odaira-sensei's books with a mind devoid of worldly thought, come see me in second year class ☆! I'll lend you his books!"

"S-Sure..." the boy said, his eyes wandering. He seemed to be trying his hardest not to make eye contact. I felt it was important that upperclassmen like myself did our best to set the younger students on the correct path.

Now, then... I looked around the rest of the classroom. I hadn't come here to give guidance to some underclassman I didn't know. I had come to invite Kuroha to eat lunch.

"Where's Kuroha...?"

There she is. Her long black hair and the green accessory she wore in it made her easy to spot. She was sitting on the window side of the classroom, and was reading a book by herself. The title of the book was "冬耳虎彦　二十一世紀" (Torahiko Touji's *The 21st Century*).

The title used kanji, so I figured it must be a work of modern Japanese literature. It looked very difficult to read. To an outside observer, my sister must have seemed like someone that was extremely hard to approach. For someone with her adult beauty and her head buried in modern literature, it must have been difficult for even her classmates to talk to her.

As if on cue, a bustling gaggle of girls passed right in front of her. *Yikes...* I saw her glance over to them for just a second, giving them a look like "Shut up, I'm trying to read here." She must not have been in a good mood. It was such a waste of her pretty face to be scowling like that all the time. *I wish she would look like she's having fun sometimes...*

In actuality, I hadn't seen Kuroha smile in school since elementary school. She would always have this stern look on her face. Although it was true that lately she hadn't had the problems she used to, still...

I'm worried for you. I wish you could smile!

Yes, that's the only thing to do. Kuroha had told me that it was embarrassing and that I should stop, but as her brother, I felt I must do everything in my power in help her.

That's right! I'll go in front of her class and say in a big voice, "Please be nice to my little sister!"

"Everyone, please listen! Kuroha over there may look like a proper lady now, but she wasn't able to go to the bathroom by herself when she was little! Even when I was paying respects to a panty flash scene in an anime, if she would come to me and say 'Onii-chan, come with me,' I would go!" I announced in a loud voice.

That was the day in which I learned that the creature named "little sister" and the creature named "demon" were closely related from a biological perspective.

When I woke up, I was laying in my bed in the room that I was borrowing in Yuzu-san's house. I could sense someone next to me, and when I turned my head I saw Kuroha sitting at the desk, holding a pen in her hand, writing something as she looked at her dictionary.

"...Hee hee..."

Kuroha, are you laughing?

I narrowed my gaze. Kuroha's cheeks were slightly flushed, and it looked like she was having fun. I felt like I hadn't seen Kuroha looking like this for quite a while. I sat up, and called out to her.

"Kuroha."

Kuroha shoved the piece of paper into the dictionary in a panic.

"What were you writing?"

"N-N-Nothing!" she replied, strangely flustered by the question.

I wonder what she was writing on that paper? Now I'm curious...

"Anyway, are you okay now?" she asked. "You were passed out for about an hour."

"Ah..." My skin was raw around my neck, but other than that, I seemed all in one piece. "Where is everyone else?"

"Sensei is writing his novel, and Miru is drawing."

"What about Yuzu-san?"

"...Yuzu-san... She went pale and was shaking, and after I told her everything would be fine, we both carried you up to the bed. After she had calmed down, she went out somewhere."

"I see... I must have really worried her. I'm so sorry," I said. Yuzu-san surely felt responsible. I decide to make sure to tell her I was fine now.

After that, we both went completely silent. Kuroha had turned back to the desk and had started reading the dictionary, but then suddenly spoke to me.

"Hey, Onii-chan."

"What is it?"

"What's the deal with... you and Yuzu-san?"

"What's the deal? What do you mean?"

Kuroha became a little impatient. "I mean what's your relationship with her? You seem pretty close... You were even holding hands together before, remember?"

"We're friends."

"Are you *just* friends?"

"Yeah, of course. I mean, what else would we be?"

My feelings for Yuzu-san were, honestly speaking, complex. If you asked me if I had feelings of the opposite sex toward her, well, I wouldn't deny it. When we were together, I would often get excited.

But right now my priority was finding a way to return to the future. At the

moment we were stuck and had no choice but to let Yuzu-san take care of us, so it wasn't the time to be developing feelings for her.

Kuroha went silent and kept looking at me, and after a little while, she spoke to me with a very deliberate intent.

"Are you listening? No matter what happens to you, or who you are with, I'll always be your little sister. Remember that."

There she goes, saying the obvious again. What a weirdo.

When I was about to answer her, I started to hear footsteps out in the hallway, and after a quick knock, the door opened.

"Gin-san, I see you're awake. Are you okay?!" Yuzu-san asked, as she nearly ran right up to the side of the bed. "I got so carried away and... I'm sorry!" Yuzu-san was wearing one of her jerseys, and she took a close look at my face.

"Oh, it's my fault for falling unconscious so easily," I said. "I'm sorry I couldn't live up to your expectations." I had realized, see, that the technique she had used was a message from her. She had been trying to tell me that to live in the rough-and-tumble 21st century, one needed to possess a strong body. "I'll become stronger. Yuzu-san, thank you."

"Gin-san..." Yuzu-san's eyes watered up. "By the way, Kuroha-san, you've calmed down?"

"Huh?!" Kuroha's eyes went wide as she was suddenly addressed.

"Did something happen to Kuroha?" I asked.

"Yes. When you passed out, Kuroha went completely pale. She told me that she wanted me to leave the two of you alone so that she could calm down."

"Wa... Wawawawa..... waaa...!" Kuroha yelped.

Huh? Why is Kuroha suddenly doing vocal exercises?

Yuzu-san was staring at Kuroha in disbelief, but then she remembered something, and pulled out an envelope from her jersey's back pocket.

"What's that?" I asked.

"Look... There was a strange letter that arrived in my mailbox."

A strange letter?

I was curious, so I got out of bed and stood in front of Yuzu-san. Kuroha lined up next to me.

“Here.” Yuzu-san took out a single sheet of paper from inside the envelope. “It’s all written in hiragana. The writing looks like a girl’s, so I think it’s probably some prank from a little girl, but...”

“Did someone say ‘little girl’?!” Odaira-sensei appeared like the wind. “I’ve been an author for 50 years, and I’m telling you that it’s a rare thing to get a letter from a little girl! They’re all mostly ones from middle or high school students who are in my ‘meh’ zone. Ones in my strike zone are super rare!”

“Where did you get those ears and legs of yours? Can humans just appear out of thin air like that?” Kuroha frowned.

“Nee, don’t go lumping in the geezer with us humans,” said Miru, who had also come into my room after hearing us talking.

“I see that everyone is here. Good. Please read this.” Yuzu-san opened up the letter. We all peered over at it as Yuzu-san held it up. On the letter this was written in a girly handwriting:

THATS SITUATION

SO ITS BAAAAD

IN BIG TROUBLE

MONEY→ NOPE

BRING MONEY TO PLACE ON MAP

WAITING ◎

CAN ONLY COUNT ON YOU SENSEI ☆

Below the writing was drawn a map. It looked like some place in northern Japan, Touhoku.

The letter writer didn't leave a signature. The letter was addressed to Yuzu-san's house, but it was all written in hiragana.

"I'm sure it's got to be a prank, right? It's all written in hiragana, and it says to bring someone money..." said Yuzu-san, not taking it very seriously. For Yuzu-san, or rather, anyone from the 21st century, the writing must have seemed very strange.

However... to myself it had a strangely nostalgic feeling. That letter... was most definitely written in 23rd century Japanese.

そうー
なので
やっぱ～い
アタシ
おかね～ない
おかねもって
まってる◎
せんせいだけが

*

On a certain day in the 23rd century, in Kuroha's room...

"Kuroha, this month's edition of *Literary Gal* has arrived! Let's read it together!" I cried

"S-Sheesh, don't just come barging into my room," she said.

"It seems like in this issue there's a remake of Odaira-sensei's first book! How cool!"

(Translator's Note: *Literary Gal* is a literature magazine published by Hoggy Japan. It began serialization in the year 2168. At first it was 90% filled with actual novels, but it has expanded its content to include articles as well, and is now a magazine that covers all manner of literary subjects. What follows is my interpretive translation of this magazine's cover story.)

Special Issue! *Literary Gal* July 2202

"GAI ODAIRA – DEBUT WORK – SELF REMAKE"

ODAIRA: On this occasion, I have taken the opportunity to remake my own debut work, *DUMDUMMY NOGOODY LILSISY*. It has been 50 years since its original publication, and I feel like there are some expressions which are no longer appropriate for the times. I thought to myself, "Why not give new life to this work that heralded my own birth into the literary world?"

"DUMDUMMY NOGOODY LILSISY" excerpt:

COMESIN→MYSELF

COMESIN→GIRL

AFTERSCHOOL GIRL SHOUTS SUDDEN!

GIRL: MAKE CLUB ◎

MYSELF MADE TO JOIN

MYSELF: WHAT KIND CLUB?

GIRL: DUMDUMMY CLUB

WAWAWA DUMDUMMY DUMDUMMY

MYSELF NO THINK LICK GIRL ☆

GIRL: MYAA

GIRL SURPRISE ROLLS OVER

YAY PANTSU PEAKY ☆

“Kuroha, how will he change this?” I asked.

“Well the remake version is also in the article...” she said.

“DUMDUMMY NOGOODY LILSISY” excerpt from the remake:

COMESIN→MYSELF

COMESIN→GIRL

AFTERSCHOOL GIRL SHOUTS SUDDEN!

GIRL: MAKE CLUB ◎

MYSELF MADE TO JOIN

MYSELF: WHAT KIND CLUB?

GIRL: DUMDUMMY CLUB

WAWAWA DUMDUMMY DUMDUMMY

MYSELF NO THINK LICKY GIRL ☆

GIRL: MYAA

GIRL SURPRISE ROLLS OVER

YAY PANTSU PEAKY ☆

"...Oh my God! This is an incident that will go down in the history of literary magazines!"

"Um... I can't see any difference between the two..."

"Look at the forth line from the end! LICK (*perori*) has been changed to LICKY (*perorin*)!" I cried.

"...Is this supposed to be some kind of 'find the difference' game?" she asked.

"Don't be silly! By this one single letter change, Sensei has completely encapsulated the difference from the world today and the world 50 years ago!"

"What are you talking about?"

"Of the 50 letters in the phonetic alphabet, 'n'(ん) is the final one, right? In other words, Sensei is giving us a warning that Japan is nearing its end. Yes, that must be what it is!"

"...Onii-chan, you really start to overthink things when it comes to Odaira-sensei's books," Kuroha said.

"Sensei put all of his feeling into just that one extra letter. Don't worry, Sensei, I understand exactly what you meant. From that one letter, I feel I understand a hundred... no, a thousand characters! Indeed, this is your literature, Sensei!"

“Hey, don’t start crying on me...” Kuroha complained.

“Senseiiiii!”

...In the next issue, Odaira-sensei issued a statement: “My little sisters told me, ‘I liked the original one better-nyo!’ so please pretend like this never happened.”

Chapter 2 - The Truth of the Situation

The super express train rushed past the tranquil rural landscape. Although it was called a “super express,” it felt quite slow to me, as I was used to the speeds of 23rd century trains. In comparison, 21st century trains proceeded at quite a leisurely pace. For someone without any patience, it would probably have been frustrating, but I was quite pleased with the train ride myself, as there was actually time to appreciate the scenery.

We were on this train on a journey to the southern part of the Touhoku region of Japan. The five of us were sitting facing each other in a box seat, with Yuzu-san and I on one side, and Kuroha, Miru, and Odaira-sensei on the other. There were only two seats on each side, so Miru was sitting on Kuroha’s lap.

“Gin-san, may I ask a question?” asked Yuzu-san from the seat next to me, turning her head. “Ever since I heard we were going to the southern part of Touhoku, there has been something that I’ve been wondering about...”

Yuzu-san was looking very serious.

I wonder what she’s going to ask me? It’s making me kind of nervous...

“Is Touhoku... in America?” she asked.

“What? There’s a cross-Pacific railroad in this era?” I asked.

“No, it’s just that it seems pretty far.”

“Yuzu-san, you seem like you’d fit in pretty well in America. Let’s dress you up like a cowgirl and see if you blend in!”

“Oh, my...” said Yuzu-san, smiling happily. I couldn’t help but to smile myself.

At that point, a dictionary was opened up in front of us, showing us the page with this entry:

東北地方　本州の北東部にある地方 (Touhoku-chihou: The area in the Northeast of Japan’s main island, Honshu.)

“That’s where it is, get it?”

I looked up and saw Kuroha looking at us with an annoyed expression.

“You know I can’t read that...” I said.

“Have Yuzu-san read it!” she snapped.

Sheesh, what’s your problem?

“Are you still against this?” I asked.

“Well... I mean that letter was really suspicious, right?” Kuroha said.

We weren’t on this train to Touhoku for a vacation. We were heading to the place on the map of that mysterious letter we had received. It had marked a certain prefecture in Touhoku.

After having read that letter, I had immediately gotten in the mood for an expedition, but Kuroha had been steadfastly against it.

“How in the world can you believe that nutty letter just like that?!” had basically been her opinion on the matter.

Kuroha and I hadn’t been able to come to an agreement on what we should do, but after Odaira-sensei had weighed in, we had decided to head to the southern region of Touhoku.

The postage stamp on the letter had had an illustration of a pretty girl on it.

“To my eye, this is an ancient commemorative stamp. In this time period, various local municipalities had begun to use moe characters to attract tourists and revitalize towns,” Odaira-sensei had explained.

Using pretty girl illustrations to revitalize local towns was such a Heisei era thing to do. In our time period, it would have been unthinkable. After all, those sorts of illustrations were commonplace, everyday things in our time, so they would have been no use for getting people’s attention.

“The illustration is simple and charming and very much to my taste. I really want that stamp. If we go to the place on the map, I might be able to get one of those stamps before it’s been used. I have no interest in pretty girl stamps which are used goods, after all!” Odaira-sensei had continued.

Since he had been in favor, we had decided to head to the place on the map.

After all, we didn't have any other course of action staying at Yuzu-san's house, and this way I would be able to see the countryside in the 21st century.

It was an opportunity to experience another different culture. To a person from 23rd century Japan like myself, the 21st century was filled with all different kinds of new cultures.

This was something I realized quite vividly from right inside the train. I could hear the conversation of two old women who were sitting in the seat behind ours.

"Um, you betcha. (Yes, that's right.)" * Translator's note: The women are speaking with a heavy Touhoku accent. I have also provided a standard English translation.

"Yah, see dem short l'il mownt'n back de'er? (Can you see a short mountain over there?)"

"I'm not feelin' so hot, yah? Tokyo was just uff-da, dontcha know. (There were too many people in Tokyo, and I'm not feeling well)."

They were saying things like that, using words and phrases I had never heard before. I thought it was a foreign language at first, but here and there, I could make out some Japanese expressions. It wasn't enough to let me figure out what they were saying, though. *I wonder what language it is? This is gonna bother me...*

Of course, the best way to get rid of that question was also the most straightforward.

"I'm gonna ask those old ladies behind us what language they're speaking!" I announced.

I was just about to take some of the pickles that Yuzu-san had brought with us as a little gift and go over and ask them when Kuroha stopped me. "If they're foreigners, they might not understand Japanese, you know," she said.

If it comes to that, I'm sure I can get the point across with hand gestures!

But Odaira-sensei chuckled and explained to me the situation. The old women weren't speaking in some foreign language, they were speaking in a variant of

Japanese called a “local accent.” In the past, local areas had had their own speaking styles, and the words that they had used could be different, even though it was the same language.

When I heard this... I burst into tears. They poured out of my eyes like a waterfall.

“You’ve been overcome with something again, haven’t you Onii-chan?” sighed Kuroha.

“Nii’s finally lost it,” said Miru.

“B-But... I’m so grateful to be able to come to the 21st century! We’re able to hear words that have been lost to time with our own ears! Could there be anything more wonderful?!”

In the 23rd century, there are no longer any “local accents.” Japanese is spoken the same way everywhere, and any differences in usage have completely disappeared. For someone like myself who aimed to become an author, being able to experience words that had been lost was something incredibly moving. *If I don’t cry at a time like this, I’d never be able to cry at all!*

“I’m going to memorialize this experience of a new culture in writing!” I said as I grabbed a pen and some paper from my bag that I had stored in the luggage net above. I soon became completely absorbed in my writing.

After I had finished writing a page, Yuzu-san smiled and said, “I couldn’t help myself and read what you wrote. Your writing is amazing and has so many symbols that it is really difficult to understand, but there is one part that I get! You wrote the number ‘21.’”

Ah yes, that part is pretty straightforward. Our story takes place in the 23rd century, and also...

“It means the 21st century, right?” Yuzu-san asked.

“No, it’s what Miru calls me. 2(ni)1(i).”

“O-Oh...” Yuzu-san said, disappointedly. She seemed crushed.

“Yuzu-san, don’t even try. Normal people are never going to understand Onii-chan’s writing,” said Kuroha, who looked over at my manuscript. “Yup, it’s got

tons of symbols and is written in some kind of code. Tell me, what is this symbol '◂◂ = ' that is saying 'you betcha'? Writing it vertically it looks like a pine tree... Is it a person?"

"It's you, Kuroha," I said.

"Me?!" Kuroha let out a yelp. "W-Wait a second here. W-Why would I be speaking in a local accent?"

"Why not? This might be born from personal experience, but I'm not writing a memoir here, I'm writing a novel — fiction!"

After we had returned to the 21st century, I had started something. I had started to write my personal experiences in this time in my own "Gin Imose" way. If you look at other works born out of personal experience, you'll find that essays are the most popular form, but I was writing a novel. It was, in the end, purely fictional. However, most of the characters were modeled after real people, and I had gotten permission from my sisters, Odaira-sensei, and Yuzu-san to use them in the story. Of course, I myself was in the story as well.

"There's nothing wrong with writing down the times when you are emotionally moved, but please don't go giving me strange traits..." complained Kuroha.

"There's nothing strange about it. Don't you think a character who uses words that had been lost to the ages would be the most intelligent? Those old ladies are using 'you betcha' at the end of their sentences all the time, so I'm gonna make you into a character that ends all her sentences with 'you betcha.'"

"No way. Make sure my character speaks completely orthodox Japanese," said Kuroha.

Well, aren't you picky? I gave in and told her, "Fine," for now, and that was where our conversation ended. I concentrated on writing.

"Onii-chan, you really are putting a lot of effort into this. Do you think that writing about yourself is giving you a fresh source of inspiration?" Kuroha asked, breaking in.

"That's part of it, but once I started writing my personal experiences it's living in this time period itself that gives me the motivation," I told her. "You should find something to keep yourself busy, as well."

When I glanced over at Kuroha, I saw that she had her dictionary open on her lap.

“...Something to keep me busy, huh?” said Kuroha, shifting her gaze over to the paper I’d been writing on.

The map written on the letter was showing a place deep in the mountains. A place deep in the mountains in the 21st century was like some undiscovered jungle to us, of course. We were all worried about being suddenly attacked by bears, monkeys, mountain people, deviants... but thankfully we arrived safely at our destination without any issues.

We were at an open area about midway up the mountains where they cut into the forest, and there was a single, small shack. It was considerably too small to be someone’s home. It had a straw-thatched roof, and seemed to have been made so long ago that it would be rare to see even in the Heisei era.

I wonder when it was built?

“Gin-san, is that...?” Yuzu-san asked. She was pointing at what seemed to be a stone marker. There were letters carved into it, but it looked like modern Japanese, and I couldn’t read it.

冬耳虎彦の草庵 (The Thatched Cottage of Torahiko Touji)

Kuroha muttered to herself “Torahiko Touji... I know that name...”

“I see. So this must be a person who makes stone markers, right? They sure had a lot of different professions in the 21st century,” I said, impressed.

“...No, he’s a writer from long ago,” Yuzu-san said.

“A writer from long ago? From what era?” I asked.

“He lived from the Meiji to the Taisho era. This stone marker must be in commemoration of him. It looks like Torahiko Touji used this cottage.”

“We need a stone monument to commemorate the love between Miru-chan and me! I have my house in NERIMA, so I think I’ll erect it right outside the train station,” remarked Odaira-sensei.

“It can be your gravestone, geezer,” replied Miru.

In the 23rd century, the tradition of visiting people's gravestones had gotten considerably less common, but if the grave was right in front of the train station, it wouldn't be that out of the way for people.

Good idea!

"I've never heard of someone named Torahiko Touji. Have you, Sensei?" I asked.

"Yes, I know the name, and it doesn't surprise me you haven't read anything of his, Gin-kun. Perhaps you have, Kuroha-kun?"

"I've read what's considered his classic work, *The 21st Century*. The description of the lake at the end was incredibly beautiful, and it left a strong impression on me."

Odaira-sensei nodded in agreement and gazed at the stone marker. "Torahiko Touji... Somewhere in the back of my mind I feel like I know something... I can almost recall... It's like something will click, and yet, it's not quite there..." Odaira-sensei fell deep into thought for a moment, and then suddenly his face lit up. "That's it. Kuroha-kun, do you happen to know what Torahiko Touji's real name was?"

"Real name? No, I don't... You're saying that Torahiko Touji was just a pen-name?"

"There are many cases where the author writes under a different name than their given one. For example, Ogai Mori was actually named Rintaro Mori. Edogawa Ranpo's actual name was completely different, Tarou Hirai. And the author of *Oniaka*, Kurona Gura, is just *Ragnarok* with the syllables in reverse order."

The fact that the pen-name Kurona Gura had been taken from Norse mythology was quite a famous fact.

"I'm sure that Torahiko Touji's real name is something else. If we knew what that was, then..." Odaira-sensei trailed off.

"Kuroha, it's not written on the stone marker?" I asked.

Kuroha shook her head no.

“Well, no matter. We’ll soon find out why it was we’ve been led to Torahiko Touji’s cottage,” said Odaira-sensei, pointing to the shack. “From the person that’s inside.”

Suddenly I began to feel nervous. *Is the person who sent the letter inside the shack?!* I gulped in anticipation, and Miru tugged at my SCHOOL UNIFORM.

“Nii, I’m tired from all this serious stuff. And I’m hungry.” Miru’s stomach growled in agreement with her words.

Speaking of which, what time is it? It must have already been well past noon. Now that Miru had mentioned being hungry, I suddenly realized how hungry I was myself.

“Let’s eat lunch inside, then,” suggested Yuzu-san, holding up the handmade lunch boxes that she had wrapped in a cloth.

Incidentally, Kuroha had tried to make the lunch boxes first, but after she had made Odaira-sensei do a taste test, he had refused to come out of the bathroom. We had decided in the end that Yuzu-san should make all our lunches. That had definitely been the correct decision.

“I can’t wait! Let’s go ahead and eat lunch right now!” I said, and I tried to open the door to the shack. It took a bit of force, but it wasn’t locked and the door started to slide open.

All right, it’s time to meet you face-to-face, letter writer!

I slid the door wide open.

Instantly, my field of vision was filled with smiling faces of 2D girls. The walls were covered with illustrated posters.

“W-What is this...?”

I was at a loss for words. Covering the floor were all manner of things that didn’t match with the old-fashioned construction. Piles of DVDs and Blurays, types of video media that existed in the 21st century, were falling over. There were tons of books and magazines. I could even see some hugging-pillow covers and tapestries here and there.

They were mostly moe.

Everything was just haphazardly strewn about, making a horrid mess. Miru muttered to herself, “This is a den of iniquity...”

Odaira-sensei laughed, “Well if they bought all of this, no wonder they ran out of money.”

Now that you mention it, the letter did say something about running out of cash and being in big trouble. Did the letter writer buy all this stuff in here?

“What an incredible haul. If one had this much treasure in the 23rd century how many tens of billions of yen could you sell it for, I wonder? The Agency for Cultural Affairs would go nuts, and Prime Minister Nyamo-chan might even come to see it!” I said.

Looking around, I actually saw the holy painting of the angel and the tentacles which we had seen in the exhibit at the museum. There was also one of a shrine maiden and tentacles. And one of a nun and tentacles. *I knew it! In this era, religious paintings used tentacles as a motif!*

“Whoever it was definitely had quite the individual taste... But they don’t seem to be here,” said Kuroha, looking around the room.

There was only this one small room in the building. So if there wasn’t anyone in here, that means the letter writer definitely wasn’t here.

But seriously, there is so much stuff here! I think I’m getting dizzy...

“...Huh?” Something caught my attention. There were so many different moe products here, but not a single figure.

“It looks a lot like my brother’s room, but I don’t see any dolls,” said Yuzu-san.

“Nii, this person is a true believer,” said Miru.

“True believer?”

“They are only interested in 2D.”

Aha! There were some people who preferred 2D so much that they considered even figures to be too 3D for them. Sometimes I would read editorials in the newspapers expressing this opinion.

My classmate, Sugawara-kun, had been someone like that. When he had found out that there had been a figure made of one of his girlfriends, he had gotten extremely angry and gotten himself arrested for starting a sit-in in front of the

manufacturer in protest.

“Gin-san, seeing everything in a mess like this kind of makes me want to tidy up. Do you think it’s okay if I clean a little? I’d like to eat somewhere neat,” Yuzu-san said.

“Sure, Yuzu-san,” I agreed. “But there is something I need to do before that.”

“What is that?”

“Go to the bathroom.” I left the shack and headed out to do my business in the woods.

I was hungry and wanted to hurry back to everyone so we could eat lunch, so I didn’t take very long and was about to head back.

“Uwa.... Wah....”

I heard a voice. I stopped and listened.

“Uwah.....”

The voice was coming from somewhere close by. It sounded like a girl’s voice by the tone.

“Uwaahhh...”

Is she crying? I could hear sniffling now. *Who could it be? A girl crying in the cold, shadowy woods?* I was curious.

I headed in the direction of the voice, and I found a little girl sitting on the ground.

She was short, and looked like she was still a little girl. She was dressed in what we called in our time period the “old school style,” which is more correctly called a sailor uniform. Her hair was tied with two scrunchies, and she was wearing goggles on her head. The bag she was wearing on her front was like a little pouch.

You’ve noticed I’m standing here... She spoke to me without even looking up.

“Who are you-noda?”

She spoke in a high pitched, childlike voice that sounded like a character from an anime, complete with a -noda vocal tic.

Who? Who else would it be in some random forest like this?

“I’m just a passerby,” I told her.

“It’s not normal for someone to be passing by in a forest like this-noda. Now, go away-noda!”

“But I can’t just abandon a crying little girl...” I said. The girl stood up and looked at me. If I were to describe her face using animals for comparison, I would say that her eyes were big like a squirrel. They were extremely adorable. By the looks of it, she was probably in middle school, and definitely younger than myself.

I couldn’t tell for certain with her sitting down, but her sailor uniform looked slightly too big, and the sleeves were too long. *Maybe this is a fashion style in the 21st century?*

The girl looked me straight in the face with her teary eyes. “You’re kind-noda. But also suspicious-noda. Who are you-noda?”

“I told you already, just a passerby.”

“Someone wandering around deep in the mountains wearing a school uniform... What would you think about someone like that?”

“I’d say that would be a pretty literary happening.”

“...I’d say it was someone who was definitely not a passerby-noda. It was someone who had a reason to be there-noda.”

“Are you here for some reason yourself?”

“*Hai*-noda. I am searching for something-noda.” The girl bit her lip. “I screwed up-noda. I was so happy that I didn’t watch my surroundings-noda.”

“You lost something?” I asked.

She nodded and took out a number of cards from her little bag. All of them had illustrations of pretty girls on them.

“These are trading cards-noda. If you collect them all you can even play card games with them-noda.” The girl held up the cards joyfully.

How rare for a girl of this time period to be so interested in moe.

“The problem is I lost one of the cards-noda. It was totally my mistake-noda.” Tears began to well up in her eyes. “The wind blew it away, and I can’t find it anywhere-noda. I searched all around the ground, but it’s just not there-noda...”

“I see. Well, if looking down didn’t work, then...” I took out a pen and paper and wrote what I wanted to explain and showed it to the girl.

“What’s this? ‘↓ × ↑ ◎’... What do those symbols mean? Some kind of special move?”

“Don’t look down, look up,” I explained.

“I kind of feel like I’m being talked down to-noda...” She started to frown, but then looked up. “Ah!” she said curtly, and pointed straight up. There was a card stuck in the branches of the tree. “I found it-noda!”

As the girl yelled in glee, she started rummaging around in her little bag.

“What are you doing?” I asked.

“I’m gonna take out my secret weapon to get it-noda!”

When she pulled her hand out of the bag she was holding a colorful plastic toy grabber hand. It was clearly too big to fit in that little pouch...

How did she do that? I don’t understand at all how that works...

“I present to you the ‘Meguri Hand’-noda!” she yelled, stretching out her arm holding the grabber toward the tree branch with the card. But unfortunately, the grabber only grabbed air. The girl was too short, and it didn’t look like the grabber would come even close to reaching it.

“Hm-hmm, don’t think I’ve given up yet-noda. I have an attachment called the ‘Meguri Extendo-matic’! It makes the ‘Meguri Hand’ stretch further-noda!” she said, rummaging around again in her little pouch. “I-It’s not there! I must have forgotten it-noda!” It seemed like she didn’t have what she was looking for this time. “Maybe I really am a screw-up-noda...”

She started to cry again.

Poor thing. I should help her.

“Please, you can climb on my shoulders,” I said.

“Huh?” Perhaps she didn’t understand what I meant at first, because she looked suspicious for a moment, but then her face lit up. “Okay!”

She hopped right up on my shoulders. I could feel the warmth of her thighs on my neck.

“Okay, now stand up-noda!” she commanded.

On command, I slowly stood up. I could feel her weight on my shoulders, but she was small and light.

“Let’s try this again-noda! ‘Meguri Hand’!”

I looked up and saw the girl once again stretch out the grabber, and this time she successfully grabbed the card.

“I did it-noda! Thank you-noda!”

Maybe the girl got carried away, because she jumped for joy on my shoulders. Her little butt was floating in the air.

“W-Watch out!” I cried.

“I’m fine-noda!” she said, but... “Uh oh... -noda!”

She began to lose her balance, and started slipping of my shoulders. She took me with her, and I also fell with a thud.

I fell flat on my back, and the moment I hit the ground, I saw stars.

“Owwww... Are you okay?” I managed.

I turned toward the girl and saw her face right next to mine. She was so close I could feel her breath. Her adorable face was right in front of me, and I was startled...

“Staaaarrrrre...” The girl took a good long look at my face.

I was feeling a little embarrassed and sat up, and she also stood up.

“I feel like I’ve seen your face somewhere before-noda,” she said. “Tell me your name-noda.”

“Gin Imose.”

When I said my name, she made a face like “Oho!”

“...Say that again-noda,” she told me.

“Sure. I’m Gin Imose.”

“Gin Imose... No, that’s just too much of a coincidence...” For some reason her voice went quiet. “...I’d like to ask you a question. Are you writing a novel?”

“Yes. I’m hoping to be a professional writer one day.”

Her eyes opened wide. “Do you happen to have little sisters?”

“I do. Two of them, in fact.”

“And when you write, you use a lot of symbols?”

“When I write novels, yes, I use them a lot.”

“...One last question. If you had to choose between leggings, knee-socks, or pantyhose, which would you choose?”

Each one had its own good points, but for a man of the Imose household, there was no other choice but to love black stockings. So much so that it was a family tradition that any girl in the Imose family had to wear black stockings from the age of 15 years old.

“Pantyhose. Black, if possible.”

When I answered, the girl’s face went nearly pale, and she looked like she had just seen a ghost.

I’m just a normal human, you know!

She pointed a finger at me, waveringly, and said, “You’re... that... Gin Imose...”

“Uh... Yes... And?”

“...No. Never mind. It’s nothing-noda.” She shook her head a little bit, and said to herself, “No, I must not-noda...” as if convincing herself of something.

What in the world is this? Is my name such a strange thing to hear in this time period? As I was questioning her reaction, her expression straightened out.

“Gin Imose-kun, it’s only polite that I also tell you my name-noda!” She proudly proclaimed her name from her tiny lips: “I am —”

“What are you doing?”

Just as the girl was about to state her name, a pointed voice interrupted. It didn't sound pleased.

"I was just..." I looked toward the origin of that voice, Kuroha. She had her arms crossed, her brows furled, and was walking straight toward us.

"I was wondering what was taking you so long, and here I go finding you..." She stood in front of the girl and me.

"I think I'm scared-noda..." the girl said, hiding herself behind me. Kuroha came right up to me and looked at the girl hiding behind my back.

"Yup, as I figured," said Kuroha, who began to flip through the dictionary she was holding under her arm. "To think we'd meet a famous person in a place like this. Onii-chan, she's this."

I looked at the page Kuroha had opened for me. The entry her long, thin finger was pointing to was "Professor (博士)."

I wasn't able to read the kanji, but I could read the hiragana, so I knew what it said.

"I see! You must be named 'Professor,' then! What a nice name!" I exclaimed.

"You're playing dumb on purpose... right?" Kuroha asked. "Think for a second! Professor! Professor! Like as in science!"

A science professor... Ah!

I turned around in surprise. The girl was smiling smugly up at me. Her adorable face started to trigger some memories from deep in my mind. I remembered watching the news in the 23rd century. It was about a certain person who was creating inventions that humanity had never seen before. I compared the newscast in my memory to the girl standing in front of me...

"Kuroha, you mean she's..."

"Yes. This is Professor Choumabayashi, the genius girl who has been called the brains of Japan."

"Pleased to meet you, Imose-kun-noda," the girl said. "I'm Meguri Choumabayashi-noda!"

“Pleased to meet you too, Professor.” As I said this, I took a close look at the professor. After all, she looked like an angel of hope to me. You see, if she was here in the 21st century, that meant that she had crossed the boundaries of time to get here. In other words — she had to have the marshmallows that allowed you to travel through time! *Could she be the solution to all our problems?!*

Of course, things were not so easy.

“Ah, my bad-noda. Not only did I forget to sign the letter, I also totally forgot to put in the first page. I really messed up-noda.”

We had returned to Torahiko Touji’s cottage. Professor Choumabayashi had an apologetic look on her face. It turned out that it was the professor who had sent us the mysterious letter. It seems like she had been camped out here in this shack for a certain reason for a while.

“That’s so like you, Choumabayashi-kun, to spend all your money and get stuck here,” laughed Odaira-sensei.

After traveling to the 21st century, the professor had been so overjoyed that she had gone on a shopping spree. She had burned through all the money from this era that she had prepared, and she hadn’t even had enough left to buy a train ticket. She had used her last bit of cash to buy a postage stamp and asked her friend Odaira-sensei for help, so it seemed.

She’s got a serious love for 2D, and also a serious spending habit.

“But you can just buy things that are national treasure-level from online stores-noda. How could I control myself in a situation like this-noda?! And then they would tell you, ‘People who purchased this item also bought these!’ like it would just read my mind-noda! If I didn’t buy them too, I would feel like a loser-noda!”

“Those are some pretty poor excuses,” said Kuroha.

“What a waste,” said Miru.

Both of my little sisters were hardly considerate. Whether it was to Odaira-sensei or the professor, everything they said was so rude.

“I’m really happy that I’m able to show everyone my collection-noda. That’s actually why I asked you to come-noda. Or well, I just decided that now-noda. All’s well that ends well-noda!”

“Why are you so fixated on 2D, Professor?” asked Kuroha.

The professor got a puzzled look on her face. “...? I’ve been around 2D things ever since I was little, so I guess I just became that way without thinking about it-noda. Was it different for you, Kuro-chan?”

In the 23rd century, everyone grows up surrounded by 2D characters, so people don’t need any special reason to come to love them. On the contrary, people who react coldly to 2D like Kuroha are very much in the minority.

“You’re a very *current-day* person, Professor, loving 2D as much as you do,” said Kuroha, stressing the “current-day” in a certain manner, but the professor didn’t seem to notice.

“Of course I am-noda! My entire reason for becoming a scientist was to one day travel to the world of 2D!”

To travel between dimensions...

It was a goal that many a scientist had challenged, but none had succeeded. It was humanity’s ultimate dream. There were many people in the 23rd century who would have loved to move to the world of 2D.

As an example, sometimes my classmate Sugawara-kun would sob to himself, “I wish I could live in the 2D world, too...” He would even cry in class. His beloved girlfriends were 2D characters, so it was only natural, after all.

The professor was trying to help save the poor little lost lambs like Sugawara-kun. *How wonderful!*

“And that’s also the reason you didn’t buy any physical objects like figures?” I asked.

“Figures are 3D-noda. They aren’t 2D, so they don’t count-noda!”

I was right!

“The time traveling marshmallows were supposed to be dimension traveling marshmallows-noda. So they’re actually a failed invention-noda.”

“Even your failed inventions are amazing breakthroughs... You really are a genius,” I said.

“You’re flattering me-noda. Well, I’m not going to lose to anyone when it comes to passion-noda!”

When I looked at the professor’s big smile, I really got a sense of her. *Her passion is the source of her genius to create things!*

I was so moved that I started to shake, and Miru tugged on the professor’s sailor uniform.

“How did you know where we were, Meguri?” she asked.

“I used this-noda.”

From her little pouch, she pulled out something that looked like a retro-game light gun. It seemed like she called it the “Meguri Gun.” The scope on the gun could be used like a radar and would let you find out where any human who had eaten a marshmallow was.

“Why is it in the shape of a gun if it’s a radar?” Miru asked.

“That was a request from the sponsor-noda. They’re going to make it into a toy and sell it-noda.”

I gathered that the professor was sponsored by a very prestigious, legendary toy company that went back more than 200 years. It was called TAKARA TAMI or BONDAI or something like that. “I need a sponsor to help pay for my research-noda. I’m aiming for my ‘Meguri Gun’ to be the number one ranked toy online-noda. I’ll make it a limited edition, and when it goes on sale, it’ll sell out in a flash-noda!” The professor puffed up her chest with pride.

Ooh, a limited edition!

Kuroha seemed a little exasperated, and asked the professor, “Why didn’t you just use a marshmallow? You can use them to go anywhere you want, right? There wasn’t any reason to send a letter.”

The professor answered immediately without any hesitation. “I don’t have any

marshmallows-noda!”

We were all at a loss for words.

“...Whaaaat?! Then we can’t go back to the future?!” I cried.

“Well, technically speaking I do have marshmallows, but they’ve already gone past-noda.”

“Gone past what?”

“Their expiration date.”

The strength gave out in my legs.

“Um... You’re saying that the time traveling marshmallows have an expiration date? They’re not some candy sold in a store, they’re an invention of yours, right?” complained Kuroha.

“What are you saying-noda? Yes, they’re my invention, but they’re also a proper food product-noda. Of course there would be a expiration date to guarantee the quality taste-noda! Well, I didn’t realize they would expire myself until just recently-noda,” said the professor without a hint of guilt.

Past their expiration date... So that’s why we couldn’t use our marshmallows any more.

“I could just make some more of them, but I hardly have any ingredients left-noda. I maybe have enough to make them two or three more times-noda. These marshmallows aren’t something I can just make simply, so I decided that the next time I make them, I have to make sure we solve the crisis-noda.”

The crisis. The word echoed through my body.

“Crisis... You must mean...”

“Of course. Just as you all deduced, because a certain individual stole the manuscript for the work that formed the inspiration for *Oniaka*, history was changed-noda.”

The professor had traveled to the Heisei era in order to solve the crisis herself. She must have known something crucial about what had happened.

“I understand. We’ll do everything we can to help. With that radar, you must

know where the person is who's behind it, right? Let's hurry up and go catch them!" I said.

"Well, about that... They also stole a cape that lets you avoid detection from my radar-noda. I used the radar to figure out that they were in this time period, but thanks to that cape, I don't know their exact location-noda. I can't just use the marshmallows to warp right next to them-noda..." The professor bit her lip, clearly frustrated.

"So who exactly is behind all this?" I asked.

My pulse jumped into high gear. Finally, we would have the answer to who was behind the curtain, pulling all the strings.

Who is it? What are they after?

The professor turned to me as I awaited her answer with bated breath, and she spoke in a meek voice.

"Sadame Choumabayashi. My older brother."

*

On a certain day in the 23rd century, in Kuroha's room...

"Kuroha, it's this month's edition of *Literary Gal*. There's an article describing the changes to Japanese over the years through translations of the *Man'yoshu*."

"The changes to Japanese... Hmm, that sounds like a worthwhile read."

Special Issue! *Literary Gal* May 2202

"See the changes to Japanese through translations of the *Man'yoshu*"

Original Text: 7th-8th century

籠毛与　美籠母乳　布久思毛与　美夫君志持　此岳爾　菜採須児　家吉閑　名告紗根　虚見津　山跡乃国者　押奈戸手　吾許曾居　師吉名倍手　吾己曾座　我許背歯　告目　家呼毛名雄母

komoyo mokomochi fukushimoyo mibukushimochi komowokani natsumasuko ihekikan namerasane soramitsu yamatonokuniha oshinabete warekosowore shikinabete warekosomase warekosoha norame ihewomonawomo

Bascat, bascat-faire, spade, spade-faire weld, pack thee erb, maid. Wah fram thy, priva nem? Yamato lond alle, catre ma. Vist brood rul ma. Nem eh hom tall, maid tall nem yee?

Modern Japanese Translation: 20th century

籠もまあよい籠をもち、ふぐしもまあよいふぐしを持って、この岡に菜をつまれている、娘子よ、家がどこにあるか聞きたい、名を言って下さい。大和の国はすべて私が治めている。広くゆきわたって私が治めている。私こそ家をも名のるから、娘子も家をも名をも言って下さい。

Kago mo maayoi kago wo mochi, fugushi mo maayoi fugushi wo motte, kono oka ni na wo tsumareteiru, musumego yo, ie ga doko ni aru ka kikitai, na wo itte kudasai. Yamato no kuni ha subete watashi ga osameteiru. Hiroku yuki watatte watashi ga osameteiru. Watashi koso ie wo mo na noru kara, musumego mo ie wo mo na wo mo ittekudasai.

What a nice basket you have there, and a nice trowel as well, young lady picking herbs on this hill. I ask of you where you are from, and what is your name? I rule over all of this country of Yamato. All the vast and wide land is under my control. I shall tell you who I am and of my house, so now you shall tell me your name and where you are from.

“Whoa, that old Japanese was written entirely in kanji. The translation into modern Japanese seems a lot closer to current-day Japanese, but... Kuroha, do you understand what this is about?”

“Yeah... It seems like some important person is questioning a girl.”

“Oh...? Ah, next is a translation by some ‘masked translator’ into current-day Japanese.”

“‘Masked translator’? Who could it be?”

“Who knows? They’re ‘masked,’ after all. Maybe they just didn’t want to stand

out.”

“I’m interested now. Let’s have a look.”

Current-day Translation: Year 2202

でたひと→わたくし←えらい！
でたひと→おなのこ
いるいる　いるいる　おんにゃのこ←なのはな　つみっこ◎
ちっこいおてて→かごとくし
おうち　どこ？　どこ？
おなまえ　にゃあに？
わたくし　とっても　えらいひと♂
おしえなかったら　あとちゅける∞
もいちど　ゆうけど
あとちゅける∞
おなのこ「これでゆるして」
いやん　なにそれ　しろいぬの
まさか　まさかの　おぱんちゅちゃん？
おなのこ　おぱんちゅ　てにかける
ぬぎぬぎ　ほかほか
ほっかむり☆
おもらし　おぱんちゅ　アンモ二・ａ←さーびす

detahito→watakushi←erai！
detahito→onanoko
iruiru iruiru onnyanoko←nanohana tsumikko◎
chikkoi otete→kagotokushi
ouchi doko doko?
onamae nyani?
watakushi totemo erai hito♂
oshienakattara atochukeru∞
moichido yukedo
atochukeru∞
onanoko: “korede yurushite”

iyan nanisore shiroinuno
masaka masaka no opanchuchan?
onanoko opanchu tenikakeru
nuginugi hokahoka
hokkamuri☆
omorashi opanchu anmoni-a←saabisu

COMESIN → MEE ← VIP!
COMESIN → GIRL
LOOKY HERE LOOKY HERE GIRL ← FLOWER PICKY◎
TINY HANDS → BASKET N DIGGER
WHERE FROM?
WHAT NAME, TELL MEE?
MEE VIP BIG DEAL♂
TELL MEE OR MEE GETCHU∞
SAY AGAIN
MEE GETCHU∞
GIRL: "SORRY HAVE THESE"
OH MY WHITE CLOTH WHAT?
RLY ORLY PANTYCHAN?!
PANTIES GETCHU!
FRESHLY STRIPPED SO WARM
SOO WARM☆
PEED PANTY AMMONI AHH←SAHBISU SAHBISU

"'Ammoni Ahh,'" I finished reading.

"..."

"What's the matter, Kuroha?" I asked.

"That translation is insulting," she said.

"Huh?"

"What the hell?! It's translated completely wrong!"

"Is it, really?"

“Of course it’s wrong! Panties didn’t even exist in that era!”

“Oh yeah? I wonder who translated it.”

“Isn’t it completely obvious from the writing style?”

“Yeah... It does seem a lot like Odaira-sensei. But there are tons of people out there who copy his style. The many authors out there who use a similar method of writing are called the ‘Odaira Children’.”

“For goodness sake... It’s no wonder people like you would believe that panties exist in the far past,” she snapped.

“But it says right there that the panty part is just fan service. It’s an extra bonus, that’s all. More bang for your buck.”

“That’s not what a translation should be,” she fumed.

“Why are you getting so angry about this?” I wondered.

“Just so you know, I’m thinking about being a classical literature translator when I grow up.”

“I’m sure that the things you translate will be true to the original work, but I doubt they’ll be fun to read.”

“That’s not true! I’ll translate them into something fun!”

“Then you’d better add some panties.”

ぶんげいっこ
2202
5がつ
ホゲージャパン
あちゅまれ!
オオダイラ
チルドレン
さいせんたん
ぶんがく と
おぱんちゅ☆
ほれ☆やく
まんようしゅー
だいにんき!
ハルカ・ハルカ
↓さくしゅう↓
セーラーふく
メガネしょうじょ
ぺろぺろ☆
おうぼしゃ
せんいんサービス♥
ふっこくばんとえす☆

Chapter 3 - Chronicles of Myself

“Wh-What did you just say?!”

The culprit is actually the professor’s brother!

Hearing that secret revealed caused me to be at a loss. It was quite a shock, to be sure, but I hardly knew anything about the professor’s older brother, so I didn’t really know how I should react. The one thing I was sure of was what we had to do.

We’re gonna find this Sadame Choumabayashi (let’s be polite and call him Sadame-san), and capture him! We’re gonna chase after him together with his little sister, the professor!

“This is my brother-noda,” said the professor, showing us a picture.

It was an illustration of a little anime girl with smooth, silky skin. She was wearing a school swimsuit and doing stretches.

Th-That’s Sadame-san?!

“Oops, wrong one-noda,” said the professor, laughing it off as she took out a different picture. This one looked like the right one.

The picture showed a young man, with sharp eyes and hair that was standing up every-which-way as if he’d just gotten out of bed. He had deep wrinkles in between his eyebrows, like he was dissatisfied about something.

“He’s got horrible bedhead and seems really mad. Did you forcibly wake him up and then immediately take this picture or something?”

“No, that’s pretty much how he always is, and he makes his hair like that on purpose since he thinks it looks cool-noda.”

“I wonder what 2D character he styles his hair after?” I asked. In our time period, it was a given that your hairstyle was taken from a 2D character. I had styled my own hair in a very intellectual way based off the main characters of orthodox style literature.

“I doubt that he used a 2D character as the basis for his hairstyle-noda.”

Seriously?! That was all I needed to know to understand how different this person’s worldview must have been to our own.

The professor explained to us about her brother (on second thought, let’s call him Mr. Bedhead) and his crimes. It seemed like Mr. Bedhead had secretly eavesdropped on our conversation and had found out that *Ani MAJI Mania* was the inspiration for *Oniaka*. He had then used the professor’s marshmallows for evil by stealing the manuscript. She said that all of his actions were written down in the diary which he had left behind in the future.

“This is completely a premeditated act of terrorism. His motivation? I can surmise it. He must truly revile the orthodox literary style. It seems as if he worshiped his ancestor Torahiko Touji and wished to become an author himself,” said Odaira-sensei with a grimace.

Could you get any more selfish?! ...Wait, did Sensei just say something about an ancestor?

“If Mr. Bedhead’s ancestor was Torahiko Touji, then that means...”

“He’s my ancestor too-noda. Torahiko’s real name was Kouzou Choumabayashi-noda.”

Aha! So that’s what it was!

“I figured that my brother, who revered his ancestor, would surely come to this cottage-noda. That’s why I’ve been camped out here-noda. But it seems my deduction was in error-noda. I’ve been here the entire time and he’s never shown up-noda. I thought I would show him my collection and surprise him-noda.” The professor sighed.

I see, so that’s why you were here at this hut.

“Don’t you think that Sadame-san would get even more furious if he saw what you’ve done to his beloved ancestor’s cottage?” said Kuroha, looking around at all the overflowing moe goods.

“I just wanted to see my brother go bright red with rage-noda!”

Mr. Bedhead seemed like he truly hated moe and the orthodox literary style.

But...

“It doesn’t matter how much he hates the orthodox style — stealing that manuscript was too cruel! Wasn’t there something else he could have done? *Ani MAJI Mania* is filled with Yuzu-san’s feelings!”

Of course I was also angry as someone who loved orthodox style literature, but what I really couldn’t forgive was the act of stealing innocent Yuzu-san’s novel that she had worked so hard to write. It felt as if all of Yuzu-san’s feelings had gone to waste.

I took Yuzu-san’s hand and yelled, “Yuzu-san, I promise you! I’m going to win back your manuscript from Mr. Bedhead, no matter what! And then I’ll make sure that the future returns to being the *Oniaka* future!”

“Oh, my... Thank you so much, Gin-san.” Yuzu-san slowly began to blush. “Um, you’re being really kind, but there’s something you’ve been mistaken about all this time, Gin-san. *Ani MAJI Mania* isn’t about my feelings, it’s about—”

“Onii-chan, you said you’re going to win it back, but what if he has already thrown it away?” Kuroha interrupted Yuzu-san in a hurry, as if she were trying to cut her off.

“As long as we capture him, we should be fine-noda,” the professor said. “We just have to go back with the marshmallows to the time before he stole it and get it from there-noda. On the other hand, unless we catch him, there’s no telling what he might do, so we can’t rest easy-noda.”

Since Mr. Bedhead had the marshmallows, it would be difficult to make sure he couldn’t get in the way. That was why we had to capture him and make sure he couldn’t go anywhere.

Mr. Bedhead had stayed in the Heisei era for some reason. Perhaps it was because his marshmallows had gone past their expiration date like the professor had explained, or perhaps it was...

“He might be planning something else-noda,” said the professor.

In any case, the fact that Mr. Bedhead was still in this era was to our advantage. We could chase after him even without making new marshmallows.

“Nii, I don’t get this. Explain to me!” complained Miru.

Yessir! I will now summarize all the important information for you!

The person who had stolen the manuscript for *Ani MAJI Mania* and changed the future was none other than Sadame Choumabayashi. He was the older brother of the professor and worshiped his ancestor, dreaming of becoming an author. I’d decided to call him Mr. Bedhead.

The professor had been able to create new time-traveling marshmallows, but she barely had any of the ingredients left, so she only planned on making them in order to resolve this incident by capturing Mr. Bedhead. Since he was wearing a cape which made him invisible to the professor’s radar, we had to find him using some method other than time travel.

I wanted to just go and capture Mr. Bedhead, but we had no clues as to how to get on his trail.

“Why don’t we return to my house for now? I’ll make everyone dinner,” suggested Yuzu-san, but the professor shook her head no.

“Nothing will be solved by just waiting-noda. We must strike fast-noda.”

“Strike?”

“My brother has a troublesome side to him where when he finds someone he thinks isn’t living a ‘proper’ life, he gets all high and mighty and starts lecturing them-noda.”

The professor told us a story about one of those moments. When Mr. Bedhead had been a kid, he’d started lecturing the other children around him about how panties were stupid. He would go around yelling about panties so much that it’d had the opposite effect, and all the kids in the neighborhood had started to call him “that panties kid.” It seemed he had begun to thrash around in anger.

“Lecturing people at a young age like that? How impertinent,” Odaira-sensei said. “No one wants to be lectured by a little boy. I’d be overjoyed to be lectured by Miru-chan, though. Ah, that’s a good idea! Could you scold me, Miru-chan? Do it in a really low, chilly voice for me...”

“How about you chill out in a morgue, geezer?”

“Yes, that’s perfect, Miru-chan! Scold me more! More!”

“Miru, just ignore him,” cautioned Kuroha. “At this rate, Sensei will get excited no matter what words you say.”

Man, I wish I could excite Sensei with my words!

“Um, are you sure that it’s okay if we don’t go back to my house?” Yuzu-san asked.

“Yeah. You see, there’s someone that he would want to lecture more than anyone here in this era,” explained the professor, taking out a book.

It was a paperback, and the cover had an illustration of a girl casually showing her panties. It was in a style that reminded me of this era’s anime.

“Professor, what’s that book?” I asked.

“This book was written by Maruta. His real name was Naotaro Choumabayashi. This is overstating it, but he would be the main Choumabayashi of this era-noda,” said the professor, chuckling a bit.

We descended down the mountain and headed toward an apartment complex in the city proper. We arrived in front of room 203. This was Naotaro Choumabayashi’s room.

Naotaro-san wrote lots of novels featuring beautiful girls. To Mr. Bedhead, he would be considered “An Ancestor Who Fell into the Pits of Moe,” so it was almost certain he would want to lecture him at least once, according to the professor.

If Mr. Bedhead had already made contact with Naotaro-san, we might be able to get some clues. Either that, or it was possible we might run into him there right then.

This is it...

“Okay, here we go.” I pressed the doorbell button on the intercom, and could sense someone moving inside. Then the door opened.

There was a bear.

No, wait, that’s a person?

So this was Naotaro Choumabayashi-san... First off, he was big. He must have been nearly two meters tall. He had a huge barreled chest, and I could tell he was covered in muscle all over, even through his clothes.

His eyes were so threatening they could make a person with a weak constitution wet themselves. His mustache and beard were wild and untrimmed. He was wearing a kimono and had his arms crossed, glaring at us.

So incredibly intimidating...

“Is this the Choumabayashi residence?” asked the professor, and Naotaro-san nodded ever-so-slightly. “I am a distant relative, and I was wondering if you might have some time to talk-noda?”

Naotaro-san continued to keep his arms crossed, and he looked at us suspiciously.

This isn’t going well... He doesn’t look like he’s gonna believe us.

We all fell silent. In front of this immovable mountain of a man, Naotaro-san, the only option that began to pop into my head was “retreat.”

But then he turned his gaze past my head. It seemed like he was looking at someone behind me. I turned to see where he was looking...

“Oh? Um, yes?” Yuzu-san didn’t seem to know what to say.

Naotaro-san suddenly changed his posture toward us. He broke out in a big smile, and motioned with his thumb to the room behind him. It seemed to be a gesture that meant “come inside.”

“Aha, it seems he’s taken an interest in Yuzu-kun,” said Odaira-sensei.

“Yuzu-cchi has an aura about her that puts people at ease-noda!” said the professor.

I couldn’t agree more!

We all entered the room and sat down on the floor. Naotaro-san’s apartment was just one big room in a Western style, and it was actually pretty roomy, but even so, it felt cramped with so many people inside.

Naotaro-san didn’t try to speak with us, and instead hunched his giant back

over, tapping away singlemindedly on a laptop computer. He must have been right in the middle of writing something.

I was quite interested in what kind of novel an older fellow with such a scary appearance would be writing, so I tried to secretly take a peak. On the top line was written “乙女迷宮ラブ・サンクチュアリーIII　キスより甘く (Labyrinth of a Maiden Love Sanctuary III — Sweeter Than a Kiss)”.

Nope, can’t read it.

I whispered to Kuroha who was sitting next to me. “Kuroha, I can’t read it, but what kind of novel is Naotaro-san writing? It looks like some book filled with pretty girls, but is it actually some genre of moe?”

“Hmm... There are the Roman numerals for three, which means it’s the third book in a series. It starts right off the bat with a poem. There’s no explanation in the beginning, and it goes straight into writing plaintively about the protagonist’s love for some character named Prince Hakuto. It’s definitely part of a series.”

“Oh? So the main character is a woman? In the orthodox style, it’s far more likely to have main characters who are boys, but maybe it’s not so rare back in this era? Is there anything else interesting about it?”

“I think you’re confused about something. Next to the title, there’s a ‘Submission Manuscript for the Maiden Books Newcomer’s Prize.’”

“Wait a minute, I thought he was supposed to be a professional author?”

“How should I know? Anyway, why is he sending in a serial work to a newcomer’s prize? And volume three, at that? What do you make of it?”

“Without understanding the basic principles of this era, I can’t really say,” I replied. If you tried to do that for the newcomer’s prize in our era, you’d be rejected immediately.

Naotaro-san continued writing for a little while, but during a little break, the monitor switched over to a different screen. I could see what looked like the contest entry sheet.

He clicked the form labeled “pen name” with his mouse, crossed his arms, and

stopped moving.

“If he’s a pro, then why is he having trouble deciding on a pen name now?” I wondered.

“I bet that he’s writing under a new name and trying to win the prize from a different publisher,” suggested Kuroha.

“Oh, that makes sense.”

Naotaro-san seemed like he really couldn’t decide. *Okay then, it’s a little presumptuous, but let’s give him some advice!*

“I’d suggest a name that’s either a palindrome or one where reading it backwards gives it a different meaning,” I said.

Naotaro-san’s shoulders twitched. *Did I catch him by surprise suddenly talking to him like that?*

“Onii-chan, that really was uncalled for,” Kuroha said.

Yeah, maybe she has a point.

I was a little worried, but Naotaro-san slowly turned my direction and gave me a thumbs up. *Phew.* It looked like he was satisfied with my advice.

Naotaro-san typed in his pen name into the form. *I wonder what kind of secret his pen name holds?*

“Masao Saitou.”

“...Huh?” It wasn’t a palindrome, and reading it backwards didn’t seem to mean anything. *Maybe it’s some sort of dialect?*

Suddenly, the previously bored looking Odaira-sensei knit his brows...

“...Hm? Masao Saitou?” he said.

“What’s the matter?” I asked.

“No, never mind... Big Man Masao Saitou...” Odaira-sensei was muttering something to himself. “I’m pretty sure that his real name was...”

Just when I was about to ask Naotaro-san what his pen name meant, Kuroha noticed something and pointed at the floor.

“Onii-chan, look at that.”

The professor picked up a book from where she had pointed. On the cover was written *Torahiko Touji’s The 21st Century.* The paper was quite worn, so it looked like a very old book.

The professor’s eyes went wide. “This... is an original copy that we have in our library at home-noda.”

“Original copy?” I asked.

“One of Torahiko Touji’s books that was published in the Taisho era-noda.”

In the 23rd century, restoration and preservation technology had progressed considerably, so there were many books from long long ago that still existed. We had a library in our family’s house where countless old books were stored.

“If that book is here, that means my brother has been here, too!” the professor cried.

I see! We’ve got you by the tail now, Mr. Bedhead!

“Did Sadame-san come here to tell Naotaro-san that he should write books more like this one, and show him the light?” Kuroha asked.

“Kuro-chan, you’d understand if you put yourself in his shoes-noda!”

“You mean he’s got some even more nefarious plan?” she wondered.

“He probably just forgot it-noda!”

There wasn’t much to say in response to that. He was related to the professor, after all.

“Nii, I have a thought,” said Miru.

“What’s that?”

“He’ll come back for it.”

“Ah, yes! So you’re saying it’s possible that Mr. Bedhead will come back here!” *We can meet him just by waiting here!*

Our spirits were all filled with anticipation. Then, the entrance door rattled open...

Could Mr. Bedhead be right on cue?!

I was nervous. Finally we would be face to face with the thief who stole *Ani MAJI Mania*!

But the person who appeared from the open door was a skinny man with short hair. He was wearing a T-shirt with English words on it, the type that I had seen often in the Heisei era. He had a gentle-looking face.

So this is Sadame Choumabayashi! He didn't look anything like he had in that picture, but criminals often change their appearance when making their getaway, after all.

Mr. Bedhead (actually he wasn't Mr. Bedhead) looked around the room, and — let out a scream.

"Uwaah! Wh-Who are you people?!"

He's acting like he never met us before! Nice try, but I'm not buying it!

I immediately stood up and confronted Mr. Bedhead.

"Don't play dumb with me! Now then, give us back *Ani MAJI Mania*!"

"Wh-What's that?"

Mr. Bedhead sure is good at this act. Maybe he has a future as an actor. I have to be careful not to get fooled by his wily ways!

"Wait-noda! Imose-kun, he's not..." But before the professor could finish, Mr. Bedhead yelled out.

"Saitou-san, what's going on here?!"

Saitou-san?

Mr. Bedhead was looking behind me towards Naotaro-san. After being called out to, Big Man Naotaro-san looked at Mr. Bedhead with his eyes narrowed, and a grin spread across his face.

"Nice to meet you," I replied meekly. It seemed like I had the wrong person.

"Honestly, Saitou-san... I can't believe you just let some random people into my room and pretended to be me!"

The real Naotaro Choumabayashi was continuing to scold the bear... I mean, Saitou-san. Saitou-san had his huge body all scrunched up small and had his face covered up with both hands like a girl.

We all left Naotaro-san's apartment and went to a local family restaurant. We all sat together around a long table.

Naotaro-san was suspicious of us, but when we told him we were friends with Saitou-san, he believed us. It seemed like Naotaro-san and Saitou-san were old friends. Saitou-san was a self-proclaimed author, although his actual job was something that, in this era's language, you would call "household help." When I asked what exactly he helped with, I was told, suggestively, "sometimes it takes a certain someone to be oneself with."

Naotaro-san had told Saitou-san, "You can come over to my place whenever you'd like." But it didn't seem like he had realized that Saitou-san had made a copy of the key to his apartment.

"What nerve he has acting like he owned the place. I bet a person like that has no problem stealing other people's work." Kuroha did not seem to have a good impression of Saitou-san.

Stealing someone else's work is bad, yes, but you can't help it if you're influenced by other people.

When Naotaro-san had finished complaining about Saitou-san, the professor brought out a gift.

It was a type of snack in the shape of a small stick which was an extremely popular Japanese confection with a long history in the 23rd century. It was called something like the "Yummy" or "Delicious" stick, and its crunchy texture was the pinnacle of decadence. A ten stick pack was 50,000 yen. They were considered quite a high-class present.

Kuroha and myself were both oohing and ahhing, but for some reason Naotaro-san's reaction was off, and he just laughed.

"But that's not all! I also have this-noda!" The professor brought out a flask, with "WATER THAT GETS YOU TIPSY" written on the label. It must have been some kind of 23rd century drink.

“We’ll all drink it together-noda.” The professor poured some of the “WATER THAT GETS YOU TIPSY” for everyone. I tried some, and it didn’t have any taste in particular at all.

“What is this?” *This doesn’t taste interesting at all. What’s the point?*

“It’s just like the name says-noda. It’s water that’ll improve your mood-noda. Don’t mistake it for alcohol-noda. I made sure that we are following all the laws from this era, and minors can’t drink alcohol-noda.”

In other words, it’s not alcohol but it has the same effect?

“Personally I’d suggest mixing it with ‘Doctor Pepper’ or ‘Mellow Yellow’ or ‘Chikaramizu’ or ‘SaSuKe,’ something carbonated-noda. That’s the Showa or Heisei style-noda.”

Are you saying we should drink it with something contemporary, in order to “drink in” the era? I see! I immediately flagged down a waitress, but when I ordered “One Mellow Yellow, please!” she gave me a confused look.

“Enough o’ that... Let’s get down to business already.”

Come on, Kuroha, don’t be... Wait... Kuroha’s cheeks looked a little pinker than usual.

“Onii-chan, hello?” she asked.

“Ah, okay.”

I was a little worried about how Kuroha was acting, but I was sure it’d be fine. I began to ask Naotaro-san about the situation.

“Did someone come visit you recently? A young man with a messy bedhead who claimed to be a relative of yours?”

Naotaro-san tilted his head when I mentioned “bedhead,” but when the professor showed him a picture of Mr. Bedhead, he recognized him.

“Ah, that person. Yes, he came to my apartment.”

The professor clapped her hands together excitedly with a “Yes!”

Good job, professor! It’s exactly as you thought! Mr. Bedhead had gone to see Naotaro-san. *We might be able to find out in which direction he went!*

“...But how did you people know that?” Naotaro-san asked.

“Ah... Um...” I tried to explain, but the professor chimed in instead.

“We’re trying to find out where he went because of certain reasons.”

“Oh, I figured as much. It makes sense he was working for some evil company,” nodded Naotaro-san, sounding as if he’d been convinced.

Just as the professor had predicted, Mr. Bedhead had appeared to lecture Naotaro-san. He had ranted like crazy on his doorstep, and when his fervor had hit its peak, he’d thrown that copy of Torahiko Touji’s book, yelling, “Write *this* kind of book!”

Naotaro-san had thought he was trying some new kind of door-to-door pressure sales technique.

“My brother has a real temper problem, so he might even throw his precious book in anger without thinking-noda,” the professor said.

“So then, do you happen to know where this ‘evil salesman’ headed off to?” I asked.

“Not really...” he said, shaking his head no. “He said something like, ‘I will complete this book myself!’ while holding a book titled *The 21st Century* in his hand.”

“Complete it?” I asked.

“I didn’t really understand what he was talking about...”

“Maybe he was talking about *TOKYO TOWER NEXIA*?”

“Imose-kun, that’s a story from quite a bit later, and I don’t think he meant solving his own business himself-noda.”

Naotaro-san didn’t have any more information about Mr. Bedhead. We had finished our business with him, but it would be boring to just go our separate ways immediately, so we asked him about himself.

He told us that he had been away because he’d been in TOKYO at a get-together for writers.

“Yeah, it was quite a scene...” he went on.

He said that there'd been some girl high school student there, and when he'd told her he wrote moe novels, she'd really started to hate him.

"What kind of girl was she?" I asked.

"She goes to some high school out west in some place called Okutama, and is the president of their literary club or something."

A high school in OKUTAMA... President of the literary club... Rings a bell, maybe?

"'I hate moe with a passion,' she told me. Just recently, some weird boy who loved moe had caused her a lot of trouble, it seems. He had barged into the club room and yelled at her about how she had no taste in literature, and that she should flash her panties at someone. Crazy stuff like that."

"Wow, what a jerk! When someone like that causes trouble, it can give a bad reputation for all of us! I wish he would cut it out!" I replied.

"Yeah... And in the end, he even asked for her name. It was like he wanted to curse her or something. How scary."

"Ugh... That guy's trouble, no doubt about it," I agreed. "I'm worried he might end up turning into a stalker."

Here in the Heisei era society was still immature, so there were still a lot of dangerous people around, it seemed.

"Thanks to that boy, that girl has made moe her ultimate foe. Her contempt for me was so strong, it felt like it would extend all the way to my grandkids."

It sure would be a problem if a grudge started between the Choumabayashi family and that girl's family that lasted for generations! ...There was something about this story that bugged me, but I figured it just must have been my imagination.

After continuing to have light conversation with Naotaro-san and Saitou-san, they told us they had to go back and continue with their writing. As we watched Saitou-san head out with his huge back of his, Odaira-sensei whispered to me quietly.

"Gin-kun. Saitou-kun likes simple books that capture a maiden's heart, and he

doesn't like stories that are complicated at all. Also, Yuzu-kun is exactly his ideal maiden."

"It's quite rare that you would talk so much about a man, Sensei."

"Hahaha... Well, this is him we're talking about. Saitou-kun seems to be writing novels for girls right now. But when he gets in a slump he just might take an entirely different direction." Odaira-sensei spoke of Saitou-san as if he knew about him, for some reason. "This has been such a meaningful time for me, being able to meet a god... But it seems like we are out of leads. What should we do now?"

The professor had predicted correctly that Mr. Bedhead would visit Naotaro-san. But we didn't have any more leads to where he had gone... Then, the professor spoke up.

"I guess we'll have to read that and see if we can't find some clues-noda." She put her hand in her bag and pulled out an old notebook. The notebook was clearly much larger than the little bag.

I know I've already thought this, but how does that bag work?

On the cover of the book was written in kanji "我輩録 (Chronicles of Myself)." I could not read it.

"That's my brother's diary. It's written using a ton of kanji, which is just like my brother's hyper intellectual style-noda."

"Yes, that's it! If we read that we might get a clue as to where he's gone! Please, let me read it!" I yelled excitedly.

"Nii, you can't read kanji," reminded Miru.

Oh, right. Damn it.

But the professor smiled and laughed, taking off the goggles she was wearing on her head and handing them to me.

"Imose-kun, use those-noda. My 'Meguri Goggles'-noda!"

The goggles were a translating device, it seemed. I was happy to make use of them. I put on the goggles and began to read Mr. Bedhead's diary.

Entry for March 26th, 2199

This incident has enraged me.

My parents suggested that I allow my little sister to read the work that I, Myself, have struggled to write. What a theater of the absurd!

It is wholly inconceivable that Myself and my sister shall ever be of same mind. And that is made even yet more difficult due to the countless times that she has run amok upon Myself.

Myself and my little sister have turned our backs to each other and have steadfastly walked in opposite directions in our relationship. In the world as it is today, I expect it not an uncommon phenomenon to encounter.

Entry for December 10th, 2200

It has come to my attention that my sister has created another successful invention. And yet I have not been able to make my own debut in this world.

What is this distance which exists between Myself and my sister? It cannot be a gap in our level of genius.

My sister does not question this vile culture of “moe” which has permeated the world as it is today, and rather wholeheartedly accepts it. Because of that, she has numerous supporters. That is the only reason that her work is taken notice of.

Yet I, Myself, carry the burden of this minuscule hope of reviving true literature in this world. The foolish readers cannot comprehend my noble ambition. Thus, they pay me no heed.

Does one stand on the side of the oligopoly of this world, or does one not? It is nothing but a matter of tyranny by numbers.

If the world were not as it is, it would be inane to consider that I would follow in the wake of my little sister.

I paused in reading to think, *It seems like Mr. Bedhead and the professor didn’t get along. More specifically, that Mr. Bedhead really hates the professor.*

I wonder if Mr. Bedhead wrote something about his writing? He might like different genres than me, but I'm also a fellow aspiring writer. I wish he wrote something where we could see eye to eye.

Entry for August 29th, 2201

I am engulfed in wrath. I seethe with rage, like heaven's judgment.

When I allowed the work Myself had written to be read, they all gathered around and jeered at me. They spouted such slander as, "A novel without moe is so gloomy!"

These readers had the nerve to tell me, "Go read some orthodox literature!"

In this world of ours, as the name implies, the "orthodox style" is the "correct" type of literature, and anything which does not fit into its proclivities is deemed heresy.

How mortifying.

Why must the works of literature of my great ancestor be looked upon as of such low value?

Why can they not recognize this?

Why do they jeer at me?

This world has gone rotten! It has gone mad!

Orthodox style, hear this. Enjoy your time in the sun, basking in the light of the world. Because one day, I will end you.

And to my great and honorable ancestors, I swear that I will fulfill your wishes. I will make this a world that will recognize your great works of literature, and allow you to finally rest in peace.

That was not the only diary entry. There were many other entries on many other days, all proclaiming his hatred for the orthodox style.

The most common phrases used were "will not accept" or "will make to accept." For a time being, I didn't feel like saying anything.

It was true that the various factions within the orthodox style would not recognize the literature that Mr. Bedhead loved so dearly. It was not very long ago that I would have counted myself a member of them.

It was not as if my feelings toward the orthodox style of literature had wavered at all, but yet I felt conflicted. *What is this feeling like I've done something wrong?*

"Imose-kun." The professor was sitting next to me, and I must have seemed to her like I was struggling with something. "You seem like you're thinking really hard."

"I guess Mr. Bedhead felt really strongly about no one accepting him," I said, handing the goggles back to the professor.

"So you are thinking that it's the orthodox style's fault that my brother was never accepted-noda?"

"Yeah, a little."

"Ahahaha!" she burst out laughing. "My brother just has no talent, and he's blaming it on those around him-noda. The reason no one has recognized him is his own personal problem-noda. No need to feel sorry for him-noda!"

"I wonder, though..." *Perhaps in a world painted in the single color of the orthodox style, Mr. Bedhead's talents were crushed...*

Odaira-sensei had once told me, "Isn't it better to have a variety of things?" If that were the case, wouldn't it be better if, instead of changing the future back to the *Oniaka* route, that we changed it to one where literature other than the orthodox style could be accepted?

In my head, I started to merge our 2D prime minister Nyamo-chan with the old man who seemed like the prime minister in the world of *Seishin*. *Any way I think about it, Nyamo-chan is way better.*

But...

I looked over at Yuzu-san, who was happily eating a Caesar salad. Yuzu-san noticed my gaze, tilted her head a little bit, and gave me a smile. It was the same smile as the heroine of *Oniaka*, Homyura. I felt a pang in my heart.

...That's right. What am I fretting about? I'm going to get back Ani MAJI Mania *and turn the future back into the* Oniaka *future! I made a promise to Yuzu-san!*

I had once been saved by *Oniaka*, and it had given me my dream of becoming a writer. It wouldn't be overstating it to say that *Oniaka* had made me who I was.

I believe... I believe in the work of literature called Oniaka*! I'm going to return the future to the way it was, no matter what!*

However, if I did that, it would not become the 23rd century that Mr. Bedhead wished for. It would be one where he would struggle. *If there were only someone who could understand him, even if it was just one person...*

"Didn't Mr. Bedhead have any friends that would read his novels?" I asked.

"No, my brother's been screwy since he was little-noda. It seems like he forced people to read them many times, though. I dunno the details myself-noda."

It seemed Mr. Bedhead had felt the distance between himself and those around him and avoided interacting with other people. Recently, he had been spending the majority of the day in their home's library.

"Is there a TV or the internet in your library?"

"No-noda."

"Then, how did he hear about what was happening in the world?"

"He didn't-noda! So he really doesn't know anything-noda."

When Mr. Bedhead had had a health issue and had needed to go to the hospital, he'd apparently been super angry when the 2D receptionist character hadn't been able to recognize his name when he'd written it in kanji.

This was quite a shock to me. Of course a proper civil institution like a hospital would have a 2D receptionist, and there was no way that they would be able to understand kanji!

"So you see, a novel that a person like that would write can't be understood by normal people-noda. He generally looks down on everyone else, and he doesn't listen to what other people say."

“Well, that’s just no good,” I said. “I write novels, but I listen to other people’s opinions.”

Truth be told, most people’s reactions to my novels are “I can’t follow it!”

“Oh yes, have you read any of his novels, Professor?”

“Yes, I have-noda! But it was really hard to keep myself interested in them-noda,” said the professor, raising her hands in a “I give up” pose.

When I went silent after that, the professor spoke to me as if she could tell what I was thinking.

“...Now I’m curious-noda. Does Kuro-chan read your novels, Imose-kun?”

“Yeah. Without a doubt, the person who understands my novels the best is Kuroha.”

“It’s nice that you get along-noda!”

Yes, that was right. I had Kuroha there as someone who understood me. But Mr. Bedhead didn’t have anyone like that.

For example, if Mr. Bedhead was a lonely island in the middle of the vast ocean, his only wish would be to somehow pull himself to the continent where the rest of us were...

Ah!

There’s a way! I have a good idea!

I clutched both my hands into fists and stood up. “We just need to teach Mr. Bedhead what’s so great about moe!”

Exactly! If we could just awaken Mr. Bedhead to the wonders of 2D, then we could all get along! However, the professor poured cold water over my revelation.

“Imose-kun, there’s no use. I’ve tried already-noda,” said the professor, her eyes looking off into the distance. “I captured my brother, bound him hand and foot, held his eyes open with clamps, and forced him to watch all 12 seasons of *SUPER KNEESOCKS WARS*, both seasons of *LILSIS LLLICK*, and the theatrical version of *WOMAN? SIBLING? BECOME A GIRL AND GROW BIGGER THAN THE*

EARTH-noda!”

“Each and every one a classic anime,” I agreed.

“And then afterward I captured him, tied him up hand and foot, and while he was unconscious, I dressed him up in a sailor suit and a wig and set him up in front of the train station-noda. A bunch of people gathered around, and he caused a lot of commotion-noda.”

“There are stores that sell sailor uniforms just for guys, after all.” I nodded.

“And then I just had to capture him again, tie him up hand and foot, and forcibly read to him works of orthodox literature of the various fundamental attributes-noda. Little sister, big sister, childhood friend, mother... Mother in this case meaning actual birth mother-noda.”

“So you’re into birth mother literature, Professor?” I asked.

“But even after all that, my brother did not awaken to moe-noda. In fact, he stopped listening to me-noda. It’s difficult for brother and sister to get along when our tastes are so different-noda.”

“Oh, really...?” It seemed to me that making Mr. Bedhead see the light would be difficult.

“Zahts no goooooood!!!”

Suddenly a loud voice rang out. *Wh-Wh-What? What’s no good?*

“Nopes! Abzaolutely no~ uway~!”

We all turned to where the voice was coming from. It was Kuroha. A Kuroha where her head right down to her neck were bright red.

“Looky heere... You arenn’t gonna make up wid your brother like that, proffffessor... You’re shiblings, riiight?!”

Kuroha’s eyes were watery, and she jutted a finger out at the professor. Looking carefully, I could see that her eyes weren’t properly focused, and her finger was wavering back and forth slightly.

Something was clearly the matter with her.

“This must be the effect of my ‘WATER THAT GETS YOU TIPSY’-noda!”

I wasn’t convinced, and I looked at the professor sitting next to me. “But no one else seems to have been affected like this?”

“It seems like Kuro-chan is pretty susceptible to its effects. I’m sure everyone else will start to feel like that soon. Does your head feel kind of warm-noda?”

The professor touched my cheek. It was so sudden that I was taken aback a little. But then...

“Hmph!”

Kuroha immediately stood up from her seat on the other side of the table and wedged her butt in between the professor’s and mine on the booth seat we were sitting in. The professor ended up teetering, having been summarily bounced aside.

Kuroha hugged my right arm tightly, glared around the table at everyone and bellowed, “He’s *muy* Onii-jaan! No touchy!”

Her enunciation was clearly off.

*

On a certain day in the 23rd century, in Kuroha's room...

"Kuroha, it's this month's edition of *Literary Gal*. There's another translation of the *Man'yoshu*."

"Another one? I hope it's a serious translation this time..."

Original Text: 7th-8th century

籠毛与　美籠母乳　布久思毛与　美夫君志持　此岳爾　菜採須児　家吉閑　名告紗根　虚見津　山跡乃国者　押奈戸手　吾許曾居　師吉名倍手　吾己曾座　我許背歯　告目　家呼毛名雄母

komoyo mokomochi fukushimoyo mibukushimochi komowokani natsumasuko ihekikan namerasane soramitsu yamatonokuniha oshinabete warekosowore shikinabete warekosomase warekosoha norame ihewomonawomo

Bascat, bascat-faire, spade, spade-faire weld, pack thee erb, maid. Wah fram thy, priva nem? Yamato lond alle, catre ma. Vist brood rul ma. Nem eh hom tall, maid tall nem yee?

Modern Japanese Translation: 20th century

籠もまあよい籠をもち、ふぐしもまあよいふぐしを持って、この岡に菜をつまれている、娘子よ、家がどこにあるか聞きたい、名を言って下さい。大和の国はすべて私が治めている。広くゆきわたって私が治めている。私こそ家をも名のるから、娘子も家をも名をも言って下さい。

Kago mo maayoi kago wo mochi, fugushi mo maayoi fugushi wo motte, kono oka ni na wo tsumareteiru, musumego yo, ie ga doko ni aru ka kikitai, na wo itte kudasai. Yamato no kuni ha subete watashi ga osameteiru. Hiroku yuki watatte watashi ga osameteiru. Watashi koso ie wo mo na noru kara, musumego mo ie wo mo na wo mo ittekudasai.

What a nice basket you have there, and a nice trowel as well, young lady picking herbs on this hill. I ask of you where you are from, and what is your name? I rule over all of this country of Yamato. All the vast and wide land is

under my control. I shall tell you who I am and of my house, so now you shall tell me your name and where you are from.

“Huh? But that’s exactly the same translation there was last month,” I said.

“You’re right.”

“There’s a different anonymous translator doing the current-day translation this time,” I noted.

“How much do you want to bet it’s gonna be another ‘Ammoni Ahh’ level translation again...” she said.

Current-day Translation: 20th Century

かごとくしを　もった　おんなのこが　います
なのはな　つんでいます
おじょうさん　あなたのおなまえを　おしえてください
あなたの　おうちが　どこにあるか　おしえてください
わたしは　やまとを　おさめるものです
どうか　あなたのことを　おしえてください

kago to kushi wo motta onna no ko ga imasu
nanohana tsundeimasu
ojousan anata no onamae wo oshiete kudasai
anata no ouchi ga doko ni aru ka oshiete kudasai
watashi wa yamato wo osamerumono desu
douka anata no koto wo oshietekudasai

THERE IS A GIRL WITH A BASKET AND A TROWEL
WHO IS PICKING FLOWERS
MISS WILL YOU TELL ME YOUR NAME
PLEASE TELL ME WHERE YOU ARE FROM
I AM THE ONE WHO RULES YAMATO
I ASK THAT YOU TELL ME WHO YOU ARE

“The translation this month is really stiff and forced. And there aren’t any

symbols,” I said.

“Wait? Isn’t this...?”

“Looking at the accompanying article — Whoa, this is amazing. This translation came from a high school girl reader ‘K.I.-san.’ She was so angry with the translation in last month’s issue that she sent in her own version!”

“I-I see...”

“Man, what a nasty-sounding girl...” I added.

“Why is that?”

“She went out of her way to send in this boring translation after last month’s ‘masked translator’s’ amazing translation filled with fan service! Of course she’s got to have a terrible personality. I bet she’s totally unpopular.”

“Oh, shut up. Who cares whether you’re popular or not? It’s all so stupid. I couldn’t care less what the masses out there think. What’s important is what the person you love thinks about you!”

“Why are you getting so upset? I was talking about this ‘K.I.’ high school student.”

“I-I was just m-making a general statement.”

“Oh, okay. By the way, there’s something important I noticed, something that’s going to bug a lot of people.”

“Wh-What’s that?”

“Does this article have, like, a punch line?”

“.....”

“.....”

“Do you actually think that literary magazine articles usually add in a punchline?” she asked.

“...Touché.”

Chapter 4 - Come On Out!

Kuroha was drunk.

Well, when I said that, the professor yelled back angrily, “I told you already that it isn’t alcohol-noda!”

My apologies.

But the “WATER THAT MAKES YOU TIPSY” had the same effect as alcohol, and Kuroha was most definitely acting drunk. This was the first time I had ever seen Kuroha like this in my entire life.

“Onii-chan, tell me how this is read!”

Kuroha had her dictionary open and had started quizzing me. Or rather demanding that I read the words.

“Come on! Hurry up and read it! What, you can’t? Fine, then I’ll read it for you!”

“Hey, Kuroha...”

“Come on, Onii-chan! Don’t play dumb, say something! ...Why are you acting so cold to me? ...Do you hate me...?” Kuroha started to sniffle and get teary-eyed.

Sheesh, Kuroha...

“That’s a wall,” I told her.

“Whaahe?” Kuroha had mistaken an illustration on a wall of a person for me. The picture was of a bearded foreigner, but...

“Wait... Who’s this guy wearing the lame school uniform with a look on his face that screams, ‘I’m a dumb-as-bricks average joe’?”

O-Ouch, man...

Kuroha, with her face flushed red, took a closer look in my direction.

“Oh, it’s Onii-chan.”

Kuroha grabbed my cheeks with both hands.

“Why is it that once I realize you’re Onii-chan that you suddenly look like the coolest guy in the world?”

“I’m not sure if that’s supposed to be a compliment...” I said. Kuroha would usually never say something like I was cool. *Well, she’s drunk, so I can’t believe anything she says right now.*

Kuroha pulled at me with her hands, bringing my face so close to hers, I felt our noses might touch.

“Onii-chaaan.”

“Wh-What is it?”

“— Let’s kiss.”

!

She might have been drunk, but going by the tone of her voice, she was serious.

“B-B-B...”

I didn’t know what to do. I was freaking out. Sweat broke out in strange places on my neck.

“Just kidding. I ain’t gonna do that!” Kuroha laughed merrily, then let go of my face. She then tilted her head down a little and pointed it at me.

“Instead, pet me like I’m a good girl.”

“U-Uh... Okay?”

I guess something like that isn’t so out of the ordinary for siblings... right?

I petted Kuroha along the grain of her hair a number of times.

“Ehehe...” Kuroha’s eyes narrowed, and she started purring like a cat.

...Kuroha is really acting odd right now. She’s gone completely off kilter.

“I’m always the one that’s hesitating, so it’s only fair that Onii-chan gets to experience that once in a while!” As Kuroha grabbed my arm, she let out a really happy laugh. Kuroha’s body was feminine and soft, and I ended up bumping

against her breasts.

“Hey, that’s no fair to just pet Nee! Pet me, too!” said Miru.

“Sure thing. But I’ll do it instead of Gin-kun,” suggested Odaira-sensei.

As he reached his hand out to Miru’s head, she slapped it away without saying anything. Odaira-sensei let out a delighted, “Oho!”

“Oh, my...” said Yuzu-san, with a slightly worried look on her face. “What will I do if Gin-san is enamored with Kuroha-san after seeing her in a different light like this?”

“Kuro-chan, you’re like a completely different person-noda!” said the professor, enjoying herself. But Kuroha glared back.

“You’re dangerous, Professor. You’re young-looking and cute... Don’t get near my Onii-chan!”

“Kuro-chan, you’re really beautiful, and I don’t think you look that old-noda,” the professor said.

“Ahhhh! You said it! You just said I looked old!”

Kuroha continued to clutch onto my arm and started bawling, but thankfully that also meant she stopped toying with me. I somehow felt relieved.

“Kuro-chan, you’re totally all over Imose-kun-noda. What do you actually think of him-noda?” the professor asked.

“I am also curious to hear the answer. I suspect that in her current state, she could say what she really feels,” added Yuzu-san.

What do you mean, what does Kuroha actually think of me? What’s the point of asking something like that?

“Huh? You wanna know what I think of Onii-chan?” Kuroha’s eyes went still. “That’s stupid. I ain’t gonna tell!”

“But even so, we would like to hear-noda.”

“Why?”

“I’d like to hear about the relationship of a different brother and sister.”

“Oh. Fine then, I’ll tell you. Hold on a sec...” Kuroha said, and flipped through the pages of the dictionary on the table.

愛 (Love)

“This, obviously!” she declared.

The professor lowered the goggles on her head and looked at the dictionary.

“So you love him-noda!”

When the professor said that, I was taken aback.

“Onii-chan’s an idiot, so I worry about him, and since he’s an idiot, I can look at him and he makes me feel better, and he’s an idiot so he makes me freak out a lot...”

For some reason I started to feel like I was the stupidest person in the world.

“If he’s not together with me, see, Onii-chan is no good!” Kuroha cried.

What, are you like my legal guardian or something?

“You see, I think about Onii-chan more in a day than I do myself. Half my brain is filled with Onii-chan. If I didn’t love ‘im, then what else would it be?”

“Why do you think about Imose-kun so much-noda?”

“For someone that people call a genius you sure are dense. I’m his little sister, duh! I love him because I’m his little sister!”

“.....”

In other words, the “love” that Kuroha felt was the love for family. There was no other strange connotation.

And yet...

The last time I had heard Kuroha tell Yuzu-san that she “loved” me, and this time as well, I had known that she meant familial love. But for some reason my heart always beat faster.

Wait, could it be? I thought to myself.

Hold on a second. Kuroha is my little sister. Sure, in orthodox style literature, it’s basically a given that the little sister and older brother have a romantic

relationship, but Kuroha and I are flesh and blood, 3D people. T-To get excited about my little sister in that way... I think there's something wrong with that.

Kuroha was muttering something to herself, and then she suddenly swung the dictionary around.

"It's love!" she yelled out, and fell on the table with a splat.

"...**snore.**"

She's passed out!

"I guess that's the end of Kuroha Theater for now," said Odaira-sensei, his shoulders slumping.

But then a single piece of paper fluttered down on the table. After Kuroha had swung the dictionary around, the piece of paper that she had placed in it had flown out.

The professor caught it and started to read it. She got a surprised look on her face. As she took the googles off again, she began to look back and forth between Kuroha and me like she was looking at some rare species.

"What was written on it?" I asked.

"Nothing particularly important. But it's not something I could tell you without Kuro-chan's permission-noda."

The professor put the paper back in the dictionary. I was curious, but it would be wrong for me to look at it without Kuroha's permission.

"Imose-kun, do you love Kuro-chan, too?" Yuzu-san asked.

"Well, it's embarrassing to say that I love her, but she is my sister..."

"... I guess there are siblings like that, too-noda!"

"Are you trying to say that it's something rare?" I asked.

"No, not that it's rare, it's just very different from the relationship between me and my brother-noda." The professor got a look on her face like she was thinking back to the past.

"I don't have any feelings of love for my brother-noda. I always thought that was just how brothers and sisters were, so when I saw how you and Kuroha act, I

was surprised-noda. You two just get along so well... And you both trust each other implicitly-noda!”

“I also had a deep relationship of trust with my brother. We played together all the time.” Yuzu-san went on to explain her relationship with her brother to the professor. She talked excitedly about how they used to play “little piggy” and how she would tie him up.

“Y-Yeah... I think in your case, Yuzu-san, it was not as innocent as a ‘relationship of trust’-noda,” the professor said.

“Oh, my...” Perhaps Yuzu-san didn’t get the reaction she had expected, and she seemed a little unsatisfied.

“Did something happen between you two in the past, Imose-kun?” the professor asked me.

“Why would you ask that?”

“Well, it’s just...” The professor glanced over at the dictionary sitting on the table.

“Nothing in particular happened. We were a pretty normal brother and sister.”

I was adopted, and Kuroha worried about me because of that. But I didn’t think the reality of that situation had any special effect on our relationship. I felt like we were the kind of siblings you could find anywhere.

But if you had to ask me for one thing that set us apart from other brothers and sisters...

My little sister can read kanji.

“It’s not really about me and Kuroha, but Kuroha herself wasn’t really a normal kid,” I said.

“That’s interesting-noda. Could you tell me what Kuro-chan was like?”

I began to remember what Kuroha had been like when she was very little. Before starting her first day of elementary school, Kuroha’s hair had been similar to how it was today, long and straight, and she’d been wearing a beret with little cat ears. Since she hadn’t been tall, she’d looked almost doll-like.

Back then, Kuroha...

“She was a problem child.”

.....——

—The whole family had gathered in the living room. My parents, myself, and also Kuroha. Miru hadn’t been born yet.

Kuroha was shouting at our parents, who were sitting beside each other on the couch.

“I’m not wrong! Everyone else is weird!” Kuroha wasn’t crying, but the look on her face said that she could cry at any moment. As for me, I was watching the back and forth between Kuroha and our parents nervously.

“Kuroha, you did it again, didn’t you?” asked Dad, with a strained smile on his face.

Kuroha jabbed a book at Dad. It was an old children’s book that used kanji.

“*Low Angle* is totally boring! This one’s way better!”

Low Angle was an anime that had been popular with kids at the time. It was filled to the brim with low angle shots of super young girls, and was considered a landmark work. It was based on a picture book for little kids.

Kuroha was trying as hard as she could to convince Mom and Dad that *Low Angle* was dumb and that old children’s books were way better.

How stubborn she is...

Kuroha had caused trouble like she always had, so Mom and Dad had called a family meeting. Here was what had happened: Kuroha had been reading a book in the park, and a number of other kids the same age had also been there in a group. The kids had seen a girl reading an ancient book all by herself and they’d said things like, “You’re reading something weird,” and then started to read the original picture book of *Low Angle*.

Kuroha had gotten extremely mad about having something she liked made fun of. It seemed she had yelled at them like crazy. After telling them why the book she was reading was good and why *Low Angle* was bad, she had challenged them

with a “Now just try and tell me otherwise!”

The kids had all started to cry, and had run away.

It would have been fine if it had ended there, but the mother of one of the kids was a friend of our mom’s. And so that was how she heard about what had happened.

This wasn’t the first time that Kuroha had caused trouble. She’d constantly caused problems with other kids her age in the past.

“*Low Angle* doesn’t have any real story!” she complained.

“Isn’t that a good thing, Kuroha?” corrected Dad. “Who needs an unnecessary story? It might be made for kids, but the characters in *Low Angle* are great. Especially Kayla-chan. Her calves are so smooth, and that scene with her playing around with her pet dog really pulled me in. That’s totally up my alley.”

“You’ve always had thing for the lower body, dear!” Mom chuckled.

Mom and Dad smiled at each other. Kuroha stared at the two of them angrily. She didn’t show any signs of backing down. Dad continued on.

“Kuroha, is there anything I can do to convince you?”

“No.”

“You can understand kanji, so you read a lot of old books. There’s nothing wrong with that. But I’m not going to praise you if you use them to denigrate other things.”

“...Fine.”

Oh? That’s odd, Kuroha didn’t have a response to that.

“I know that saying anything to you two is pointless,” she continued.

“Kuroha! Why must you be so negative about everything?! Learn a little from Gin!” When I heard Mom suddenly say my name, I was taken aback. I was just an outside observer to this mess, but now I was put right in the center of attention. Kuroha looked over to me with a look of spite.

Tears started to well up in her eyes.

“Gin is going to grow up to be just like me, an honest man who cares more

about pretty girl's lower bodies than upper bodies," Dad said. "Kuroha, you need to think of things more simply."

"Your father is right," Mom agreed. "Gin, say something!"

With the conversation thrown to me, I said what I was thinking.

"I actually think that pantyhose are more attractive than bare legs."

"...See that way of thinking? There's no faltering to it, it's easy and laid-back. Wonderful!" Dad seemed pleased.

"...I don't get it," Kuroha mumbled, like she was struggling. She scrunched up her face and big teardrops started flowing out. "I don't get it at all!"

She ran out of the living room.

"Kuroha!" I tried to stop her, but my words just skirted off her back. I could hear her footsteps echo in my eardrums as she ran down the hallway.

I ran out into the hallway, chasing after her.

.....——

"They're a lot alike-noda!" the professor cried.

"They're alike?" I asked. "Who are?"

"Kuro-chan and my brother-noda."

"They are?"

"They are-noda. The way that they both like older books and are laughed at by those around them, and how they get angry about current-day things and are against them are exactly the same-noda. The same sort of thing happened with my brother-noda."

"When Mr. Bedhead was made fun of by other people, did you not help him?"

"After I tried to help him, he stopped talking with me-noda."

"Ah, I see."

Clearly every person reacted differently when they were depressed. In the past, my heart had been healed by thinking about Homyura from *Oniaka*. And

currently, I used writing novels as a way to forget about the bad things.

For Kuroha, it was reading. She would sink deep into some old book and feel better.

.....——

“Kuroha, open the door already. We can apologize to Mom and Dad together, okay?” I knocked on the door, but there was no response.

I was in a hall which was slightly chilled, facing an iron door. In front of the door were pieces of paper and pens strewn about. They were probably scattered by Kuroha in her anger.

On the other side of the door was, well, our underground library.

The Imose family has produced generations of translators and linguists. We had such a large collection of books and materials that my great-grandfather had built an underground library to store them. The library was past an underground tunnel, almost like a small cave.

“Kuroha,” I said.

Kuroha was holed up in the underground library. Whenever Kuroha got depressed, she had a tendency to go there and read old books.

“Kuroha, come on!”

There was no answer.

All I could hear was the sound of a turning page once in a while from the other side of the door.

“Kuroha!”

“.....”

It didn’t look like just calling her name was going to work. *In that case...*

“Kuroha, if you’re going to sulk, can you do it in the bathroom? Then if you need to pee, you can do it right away.”

“...up...”

“Hmm?”

“Shut up!” she screamed hysterically. “How dare you say I should sulk in the bathroom? I read it in an old book. People with no friends sulk in the bathroom. And they eat their meals in there, too! You’re making fun of me, saying that I’m one of those ‘bathroom girls’! Enough already! I’m never going to the bathroom again!”

Kuroha had gotten herself so worked up that she wasn’t making any sense.

“What’s a ‘bathroom girl’? Is it one of the ‘attributes’?”

“Shut up! Go away!”

There was a sound of something hitting the door from the other side with a thwap. It was probably the book that Kuroha had been reading. *Ahh... What is she doing to our precious books?*

“You’re scared of Mom and Dad, right? We can apologize to them together, so come out already.”

“No. Why should I have to apologize? I didn’t do anything wrong.”

“You made your friends cry, right? And not just once, a bunch of times.”

“But they told me I was ‘reading something weird’! It’s not weird!” she screamed.

“It’s not?” I asked.

“It’s not! There are so many great stories in these old books! And nobody has any idea!”

“That’s because normal people can’t read them. They use kanji, after all.”

“If you study, you can learn how to read them! I’m not special or anything...”

I wonder, though... I don’t think that it’s an easy thing to be able to read all those complicated letters.

“You’re no different from the rest of them, Onii-chan! You don’t know anything, but you say that these old books are no good!”

“That’s not true at all!” I protested.

“Yes it is!”

“I’ll try reading one, then. Let me borrow some.”

“You can’t even read them, sheesh! Don’t get ahead of yourself!”

It was true that I couldn’t read the old books. *At this rate I’ll be no different from the ‘rest of them’ that Kuroha was talking about. Well, in that case...*

“Kuroha, I have favor to ask.”

“What?” she demanded.

I thought of the inside of the library where books were stacked all the way up to the ceiling...

“Will you tell me the story of one of the books in there? Any one will do.”

“.....Huh?”

“I can’t read kanji, see. Even if I wanted to read them, I can’t. So you read them for me and tell me what they are about.”

“Why do I have to do that?”

“Because I want to enjoy all those wonderful stories you are talking about, Kuroha. It’s not fair that you’re the only one who can.”

“...”

“Please, Kuroha?”

Kuroha didn’t say anything for a second, but then replied, “Fine.”

Kuroha told me the story of one of the books.

It was the story of a bird. The bird was named Nighthawk, and it was bullied by the other birds. Nighthawk wanted to quit being a bird, and in the end it became a star.

Honestly speaking, I had no idea what made that a good story. Kuroha had said, “I cried when I thought about how Nighthawk was feeling,” but I could only think of it as melancholic.

“—The end.”

When Kuroha was finished with the story, I clapped. I clapped so hard and so

long that my hands hurt.

“Wow, you’re amazing, Kuroha!”

“Did you understand?”

“Yup! I have no idea what makes it good, though!”

“What?! You’re not moved by this story at all?”

“But I understand now that I don’t understand. That in itself is a good thing. So you have to be moved for me, Kuroha.”

“...”

“Thank you, Kuroha. You really are amazing. I have such a great little sister.”

“Really? You think I’m great? ...Okay, maybe I’ll tell you another story sometime.”

If I was being honest with myself, I wasn’t looking forward to listening to a bunch of long, depressing stories. But if Kuroha could be satisfied by telling me all these old stories, I would be happy to listen to her.

“I look forward to it.”

“You do?”

“Yeah.”

“You’re the only one who can say that, Onii-chan...”

.....——

“Well, that’s surprising. Your family’s library is underground, just like ours-noda!” the professor said.

“The Choumabayashi library is also underground?” I asked.

“That’s right! My brother was always in there whenever he was at home-noda.”

“Kuroha only did that when she was depressed... But Mr. Bedhead basically lived in there, huh?”

“Yeah. Anyway, you sure did a number on her, Imose-kun.”

“What do you mean?”

“You slayed her good-noda.”

“I don’t really understand what you mean.”

“I have a little bit of an idea now why Kuro-chan is so all over you now-noda. To Kuro-chan, you’re the only one she has-noda.”

“?”

“Nii’s the only one for me, too!” interrupted Miru.

“It is a fact that Gin-kun is Miru-chan’s older brother. But he is not all. Your true older brother just showed up a little late. And who might that be? It is I!” exclaimed Odaira-sensei.

“End your existence and become a star,” Miru snarled.

“Oooh...”

.....——

After Kuroha finished, it was my turn.

“Okay, this time let me tell you a story, Kuroha!” I cried.

“Huh? Do you have a book with you?”

“No.” There were pieces of paper and pens strewn on the floor, but no books.

“Then what are you going to do?”

“Isn’t it obvious? I’m gonna make up the story myself.”

“Onii-chan, you can think up a story?”

“After listening to you, Kuroha, I’m getting all kind of ideas.”

Even from the other side of the door, I could sense she was surprised.

“You’re different from me, Onii-chan. When I read a story, it makes me want to read more. But it makes you want to tell your own stories.”

“Yeah, maybe? Anyway, listen... Once upon a time, there was a pair of black pantyhose.”

“...Huh?”

“When the black pantyhose woke up, he did 50 sit-ups to make sure that he didn’t get any belly, as he was concerned about how girls viewed him.”

“Wait. A pair of pantyhose doesn’t have a figure. And it’s not human. I don’t think it could do a sit-up...”

“The village of pantyhose was in a place overflowing with natural beauty. It was SHINRIN park on the TOUBU TOUJOU line in SAITAMA. It was a big park, so let’s rent bicycles there.”

“Onii-chan, since when did you get so familiar with SAITAMA? You said it was overflowing with natural beauty, but SAITAMA is still a big city. I heard that from a kid who had moved out from there.”

“The black pantyhose was loitering in front of the train station, wondering, ‘I wonder if my ideal girl is out there, somewhere?’ He was muttering to himself, ‘I want to be put on the legs of some girl, soon.’ He seemed down in the dumps, and his steps were dragging along the ground. Every once in a while, he would scream.”

“This pair of pantyhose seems like trouble. When you say that he screamed out once in a while, do you mean, like, with that sound that pantyhose makes when it tears?”

“The pantyhose noticed a girl that was perfect for him. That girl was angrily reading a book that used kanji in the park, and felt smart about herself after she had told some other kids about how wrong they were. And this cheeky girl was definitely not based on a real person.”

“I-I knew it! I knew that’s what you really thought of me! How cruel!”

“The black pantyhose wanted to be worn by this girl, and fantasized about it. Her skin, so white, so smooth and wrinkle-free, in the spring of her youth... Oh, to wrap such flesh all around... The girl was still young, so her limbs would react to the pressure by trying to grow. Pantyhose would control a young leg’s impulse to get bigger, and the moment when the muscle would twinge would bring him unrivaled pleasure. It would be truly a great joy for him.”

“Th-This isn’t you, Onii-chan! Someone has possessed you! Please, bring back

my Onii-chan!”

“The pantyhose wrapped the legs of the girl. The girl thought they were warm. The pantyhose said, ‘Don’t be lonely. No matter how tough it might be, I’ll be with you. Because you have a big brother,’ and then reached out with a hand like a boy’s and petted the girl on the head. When the big brother stood up next to his little sister, she was drawn to the swings. Their shadows grew long in the setting sun. The brother and sister quietly held hands.”

“...The pantyhose turned into a boy like nothing happened at all.”

“The end.”

“The end?!”

I could tell how dumbfounded Kuroha was on the other side of the door.

“At the end there, I added a bit about what I wanted to say. Did you get that?”

“...Y-Yeah.”

“I wanted to say that one of these days I’m going to write a story where the main character is a pair of pantyhose.”

“What?! How was I supposed to get that? It wasn’t trying to cheer me up?”

“The pantyhose won’t become a human. It’ll really be a story where a pair of pantyhose is the main character.”

“.....Does it take place in the future? I don’t get it. Tell me a more normal story.”

How selfish you are, Kuroha. But to satisfy the selfish desires of your little sister is the role of a big brother. I went right into my next story.

“Okay. I’ll tell you another one, then. A boy meets a girl, sees her panties, fights with her, makes up with her, and they tie the knot. The end.”

“That’s it?!”

“Yeah.”

Kuroha let out a snort, and started to lecture me. “It’s too short and too easy to understand. The complicated stories in these old books are way better.”

“...I see. But is being easy to understand really such a bad thing?”

Kuroha wasn’t able to respond. I sensed that she wanted to say something, but she didn’t. Her silence went on for too long.

What’s the problem? Fine, I’ll change the subject.

“Kuroha, making stories sure is fun. I would have never found that out if it weren’t for you. Thanks.”

“Because of me?”

“Yeah.”

“Oh...”

I could tell that Kuroha had really calmed down on the other side of the door. *Maybe she’ll finally come out now?* I waited for a little bit, but she didn’t open the door.

“Kuroha, are you still in there?” I asked.

“...”

Maybe she’s embarrassed to come out? I wonder if there’s some way I can get her to want to come out...

Oh, that’s right!

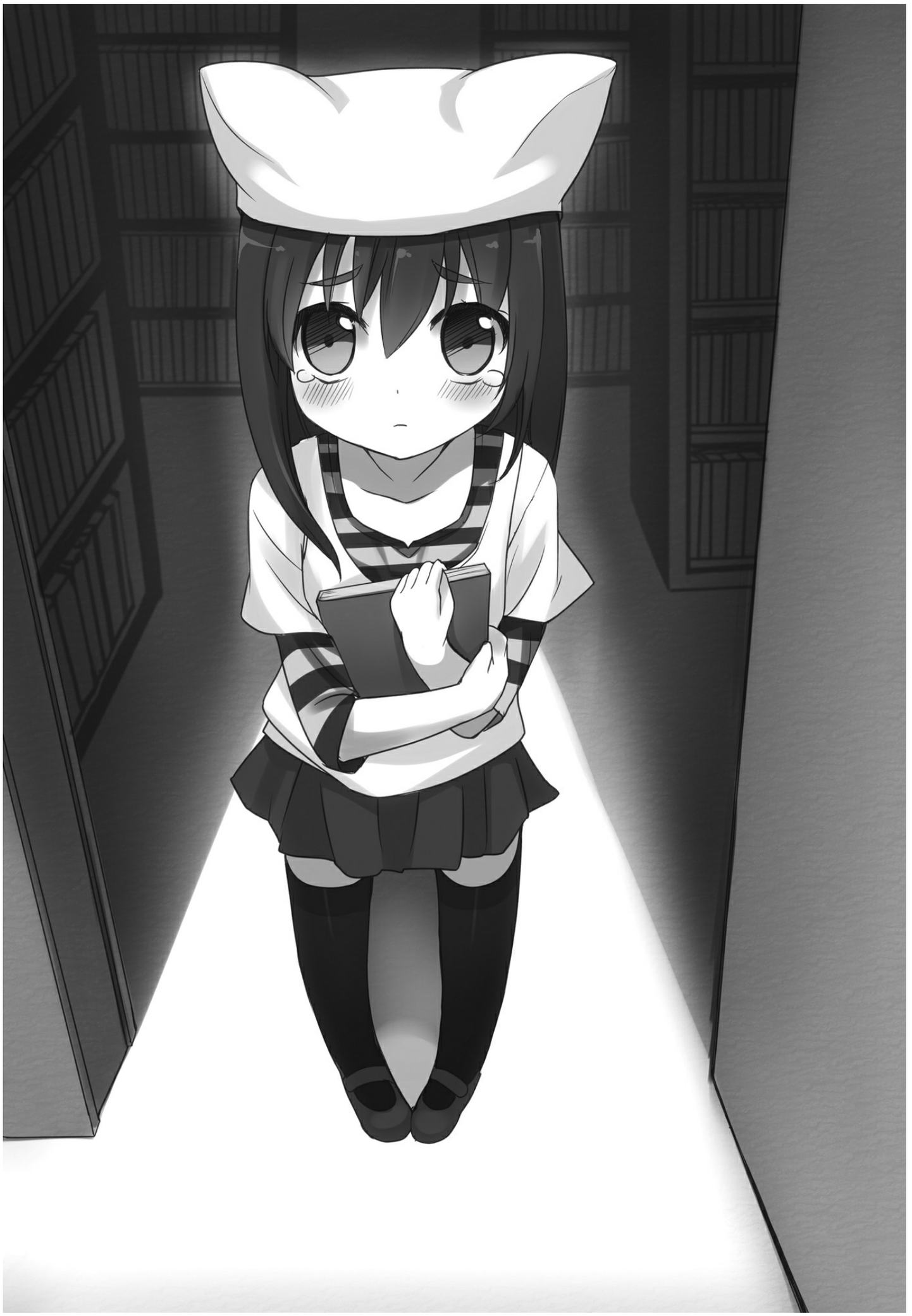
While we had been talking, I had taken one of the pens and paper on the floor and had written something without really thinking about it. *This will do the trick!*

“Kuroha, I have something I want to show you. Come on out.”

And then...

With a clatter, the lock opened and Kuroha came out from the underground library. Kuroha’s eyebrows were arched, and she was looking up at me. Maybe she was embarrassed with her eyes still puffy from crying, because she rubbed her hands in the corner of her eyes a number of times.

She doesn’t usually come out when crying.



“Here, I wrote this while we were talking.” I handed Kuroha the piece of paper I was holding.

I had written my own style of character for a boy and a girl.

“What is this, some sort of illustration?”

“It’s not an illustration. It’s prose. It’s the last scene where you and I are holding hands in the sunset.”

As Kuroha took the paper from me, she crossed her eyes and looked at what I’d written.

“I wouldn’t be able to tell if you hadn’t said so. Actually, even now I don’t really get it.”

“You can understand once you get used to it.”

“Are you telling me to learn how?”

“Yeah.”

Kuroha didn’t seem particularly satisfied with that and cleared her throat, but then quickly smiled.

“Fine, then. I’m probably the only person who could understand your stories anyway, Onii-chan.”

.....——

Back in the family restaurant, everyone was quietly listening to my story.

“And that’s how it happened. Well, things like that happened quite a bit, actually,” I finished.

“Kuro-chan was right on the edge, wasn’t she-noda?” the professor asked. “If you hadn’t been there for her, Imose-kun, she might have turned out like my brother-noda.”

“When you say ‘like your brother,’ what do you mean exactly?” I asked.

“Saying, ‘It’s not me that’s wrong, it’s everyone and everything else around me that’s wrong.’ That’s the kind of person he is-noda!”

The professor sure doesn't mince words when it comes to Mr. Bedhead. They seemed to have almost completely cut off relations, a stark contrast to my relationship with Kuroha.

It's true that Mr. Bedhead is wrong, but yet...

"Don't you think you should try to understand Mr. Bedhead a little better?" I asked.

"No. My brother's decided to walk his own path, and there ain't anything I can do about it-noda!" The professor clearly didn't have any intention of attempting to repair her relationship with Mr. Bedhead.

"It's a tough position to be in when your little sister doesn't understand you," Odaira-sensei cut in. "In my case, my little sisters all understand me, since they've stayed with me for all this time! Sometimes they disagree with each other, and then they're all running around in confusion and need a little adjustment. When that happens, I always end up having the hardest time consoling them and getting them back in line."

Odaira-sensei was wiggling his body back and forth in a gesture that was probably supposed to be him being pulled from the right and left by his little sisters.

"Nii, let's ignore the geezer's self-delusions," suggested Miru.

Of course, I have no intention of getting in the way of his creative process. I turned from Odaira-sensei back to the professor. "...Where do you think Mr. Bedhead is?"

"When you consider his personality, I doubt he came to this time period without a map of some sort-noda," the professor said. "He's probably planning something..."

"What should we do if we end up not being able to find him?" I asked.

"If it comes down to that, then I'll have to make new marshmallows-noda. I can make them two more times-noda. Once the marshmallows that he has go past their expiration date, he won't be able to act any more-noda. Then we can finish it-noda!"

It seemed like Mr. Bedhead wasn't aware of the expiration date, either. The professor looked confident in her plans for victory.

"Ah, yes! Why don't I show you the marshmallow-making equipment as a special treat-noda?" added the professor, who then stuck her hand into the little bag she had on the front of her waist.

"Huh...?" She turned pale. "I-It's not there-noda!"

I was left speechless. *You've got to be kidding me!* I started to grin despite myself. *I mean, you're telling me that of all the most crucial, important things she could lose...* This had to be some sort of a prank.

Pale as a ghost, the professor continued to rummage around in her bag muttering, "It's not there, it's not there..."

She really lost it?!

"It's not there... You mean we can't go back to the future?! What kind of equipment was it?"

"It's the Meguri Gun-noda."

"What?! That gun you had?"

"That's right-noda. That gun was actually the equipment I need to make the marshmallows-noda..." The professor bit her lower lip.

"Naotaro's apartment," said Miru, calmly, as she looked at the professor with a cold stare.

That's right... When the professor was trying to make friends with Naotaro-san, she took out a bunch of her items.

"I remember that, as well. I suspect you forgot it in his room," added Yuzu-san.

The professor brought her hand to her chest, and let out a deep sigh. "Sorry for freaking out there-noda. I thought my heart was gonna stop-noda!"

"You've always been the forgetful sort, Choumabayashi-kun," commented Odaira-sensei.

Everyone felt quite relieved. But then, we heard a ringing sound.

Is it someone's cell phone?

Yuzu-san answered her phone with a, “Yes?”

Yuzu-san looked around at us and asked, “Um, which one of us is our ‘leader’?” for some reason.

We haven’t really decided on anything like that, but if you forced me to choose, I’d say it was Odaira-sensei, as he has seniority.

Odaira-sensei took the cell phone from Yuzu-san, and from his reaction, we could tell that the person calling was Naotaro-san.

When did he exchange phone numbers with Yuzu-san?

Odaira-sensei nodded, listening to Naotaro-san. At first he was smiling, but...

“What?!” he shouted suddenly, and the color began to drain from his expression. I had almost never seen Odaira-sensei look like that.

Something must have happened...

We all looked at Odaira-sensei with a sense of unease. He hung up the cell phone, turned to us, and explained, “Naotaro-kun wanted to report that a certain pushy salesman had shown up again.”

A pushy salesman? Ah, Mr. Bedhead!

“When Naotaro-kun returned to his apartment, a young man burst out, it seemed,” Odaira-sensei continued.

“Huh? But I’m sure we locked the door...” I said.

“Imose-kun, my brother has a number of my inventions with him-noda. The locks of this era would be no match-noda.”

“He was carrying things in both arms,” Odaira-sensei said. “One was an old book, which was probably the copy of Torahiko Touji’s *The 21st Century* that he had forgotten.”

“And in the other hand was... Don’t tell me...” I said slowly.

I had a really, really bad feeling about this. *Please, tell me I am wrong about this, I’m begging you!*

“Yes, it was the Meguri Gun,” continued Odaira-sensei, crushing my hopes.

...I knew it.

“Well, now we’re screwed-noda,” said the professor, pale as a sheet.

“Naotaro-kun chased after him, but he got away,” Odaira-sensei said.

“I bet that the marshmallows he has already are past their expiration date-noda. That’s why he stole the Meguri Gun-noda.”

“...Did Mr. Bedhead know that you can make marshmallows using that gun?” I asked.

“After he hatched his diabolical scheme, it seems like he secretly researched my inventions-noda. He’s the type that makes sure everything is prepared perfectly-noda,” said the professor.

“Oh, but he didn’t steal the ingredients, right?”

“Um... Since carrying the ingredients separately is a pain, I had already loaded them into the gun-noda...”

How many functions does that gun have already?!

“Sadame-kun is going to make marshmallows and leave this time period sooner or later. Once that happens, it’ll be all over for us,” said Odaira-sensei.

“Professor, how much time does it take to make the marshmallows?” I asked.

“It takes five days-noda.”

“So we have to capture Mr. Bedhead in five days, or else...”

“...Game Over-noda.”

“Do you have some kind of amazing invention that we could capture him with real quick?” I asked.

“I wish I had something so convenient-noda...”

...It’s all over. There’s no use. We have no clue where to go next. We have no way of searching for Mr. Bedhead...

My soul left my body behind, and the world went white.

We can’t return to the future. I’ll never see my mom and dad again. Culture won’t change back, and my dear 2D prime minister Nyamo-chan and 2D

teacher Kazoe-sensei will never exist. Oniaka *won't exist. My dream of becoming an author will forever go unfulfilled.*

We will have to live here in this Heisei era...

I could do nothing but lower my head in silence. Even I could not muster the energy to say something positive in this situation... But then...

"Don't give up, Onii-chan," said a voice that echoed in my ears like a mother scolding a child.

That voice... Kuroha?!

When I turned to look, I saw Kuroha with her head up, looking at me.

"I thought you were asleep?" I asked.

"Well, I'm a little groggy, but I heard what's going on." Her cheeks were a little red, but she was back to being the usual Kuroha. She was speaking normally, too. "All we need to do is capture Sadame-san, right?"

"Yeah. But we have no idea where Mr. Bedhead is headed. It'll be impossible to find him in five days."

"Where he's headed, is it? What I'm about to say is just my own deduction, but I believe it is a distinct possibility." Kuroha had switched on her commanding Great Detective mode. It was hard to believe she had been begging me to pet her on the head a little while ago. "Our clue is Torahiko Touji's *21st Century*!" said Kuroha, looking around at all of us. "Sadame-san is probably heading to—"

Kuroha told us a certain location.

*

Special Issue! *Literary Gal* August 2202

"Special Interview with Gai Odaira"

—The Japanese People and the Written Word —

The man known as the "magician" of current-day Japanese, Gai Odaira, discusses

“The Japanese People and the Written Word.”

Interviewer: To start things off, what do you think about the prose of today?

Odaira: To separate what we call the Japanese language from its roots in the Japanese citizens is an impossible task. As you are well aware, the text in the current day is extremely simple. It is my belief that the Japanese people’s feelings of compassion and sympathy are what have given rise to the changes in the words.

Interviewer: Incredible! So it’s the people’s compassion?!

Odaira: If I were to explain briefly why it is that “compassion” has caused the simplification of vocabulary and grammar, it is simply the most obvious interpretation. Japanese was difficult. The current-day Japanese has done away with kanji, and no longer uses difficult grammatical constructs, which makes it simple to read, and a pleasure to understand. One could say that we have taken our language and made it “handicap accessible.”

Interviewer: Japanese has been made “handicap accessible”! That’s a very unique opinion you have there, Odaira-sensei!

Odaira: For example, modern literature had a great variety of terms used to describe foolish behavior, such as “idiot,” “fool,” “dimwit,” “dunce,” “imbecile,” and “moron,” among others. It was such a pity that we had so many words used to hurt other people, and the task of simply remembering them all was a struggle. But in current-day writing, we would simply write:

DUMBDUMB

and be done with it. The people of our time have incredible reading ability, and with nothing more than those eight letters, an entire panorama opens up in their minds. Fine nuance doesn’t need to be written when it can be interpreted by the reader. That is why the Japanese people’s compassionate and sympathetic hearts enable such writing!

Interviewer: You are completely correct, of course! When you said the word “dumbdumb” right there, I couldn’t stop imagining it in my head myself! Oh, no!

Odaira: That being said, in exchange we have lost some of the breadth of our ability to express things in Japanese, but being imprecise is its own benefit. It is as if the shackles have been removed from prose, allowing the reader to freely indulge in their own fantasies without limitation.

For example, things that are sacred, things that are precious, things that are beloved, things that are beautiful, things that must be protected, things that are noble, things we should be proud of... Each and every symbol of the Japanese people's true nature...

In current-day Japanese, they are all...

LILGIRL

Yes, just that one word can express all of that. It's really amazing when you think about it.

Interviewer: LILGIRL BANZAI!

Odaira: But there's more. Current-day writing can take more than 200 characters worth of content, like...

As I looked downward from the top of my young little sister's head, past her flat chest, past her shy little belly button, beyond her surprisingly full hips, to her young, supple thighs, I felt like I would be moved in that certain way. But I was not satisfied. I was not yet going to press my switch of determination. I lowered my gaze once more, and there before me were her pink-tinted knees. I circled around behind my little sister, and finally, finally, reached the holy land known as the area behind the knees. With great lamentation, I disgorged my desire.

If I were to write this paragraph in current-day Japanese, what do you think it would be like?

Interviewer: I can only image! My heart is almost jumping out of my chest in anticipation!

Odaira: WANT LICKY.

Interviewer: YATTA!

Chapter 5 - Older Brother and Younger Sister

I apologize for the sudden change, but let us discuss for a moment what a “posthumous work” is.

The professor had said it was the title of some old visual novel, but that is not what I am referring to.

The “posthumous work” that I am talking about is a creation by an artist that they were working on right before they passed away. It is quite common for them to be incomplete.

If you look at the history of literature, many of the great writers have left this world while in the middle of writing, leaving the work behind. Torahiko Touji’s posthumous work was the novel, *The 21st Century*. The book was written at the beginning of the 20th century, and it imagined what the world would be like one hundred years in the future.

In *The 21st century*, Torahiko Touji truly described in his writing all aspects of Japan in the 21st century, from the capital, to the regional cities, to the farmland and rural areas, and finally to nature itself.

Torahiko passed away while writing a scene describing the third or fourth largest lake in Japan. It ends with the main character stopping by the side of that lake.

All of the above was information that Kuroha explained to us.

“Sadame-san wrote that he was going to complete *The 21st Century* himself,” explained Kuroha.

Mr. Bedhead had said to Naotaro-san, “I will complete it myself!” while holding *The 21st Century*, and he had written in his diary about “fulfilling the will” of his ancestors, so the possibility was definitely there.

“My brother is a real perfectionist, and he would definitely want to see things himself before writing something,” the professor told us.

There had been a number of incidents that seemed to back this up. In order to write a book criticizing moe doujinshi, Mr. Bedhead had snuck into a doujinshi event, but he had been mistaken for a cosplayer. Another time, he had been planning on criticizing moe figures and had gone to a figure fair, but he had ended up being caught up with other high school boys protesting 3D figures of their girlfriends.

The last scene of *The 21st Century* was a scene at a lake. Therefore, he would surely want to go see that lake in person before trying to complete Torahiko Touji's will and write the ending to *The 21st Century*. The lake where it took place was in the same prefecture as Naotaro-san's apartment and Torahiko Touji's shack, and was just the right distance away.

Kuroha said, "If he was going somewhere, that would be the place, no doubt."

We didn't have any time to dilly-dally.

Under the clear blue sky, we were rowing in three boats across the lake. These boats were a type we couldn't have even imagined in the 23rd century, where you had to row them by hand. Yuzu-san was across from me in the boat I was rowing. Rowing at exactly the same speed next to me was Kuroha and the professor. Behind us was the boat with Odaira-sensei and Miru, which would occasionally head off in the wrong direction.

We were not heading out on this lake for fun. We were trying to find Mr. Bedhead. When we had arrived at the lake, we had used the picture the professor carried of Mr. Bedhead and asked around the local tourist and souvenir shops. We had found that a number of people remembered seeing him. People had remembered his unique sense of style and the extreme bedhead he'd been sporting.

"My brother's vanity will be his downfall-noda!" the professor declared.

We kept searching, and searching. We searched for three days. But we couldn't find him. There were almost no places in the area we hadn't already checked. The only possibility left was on the lake itself. We embraced this last smidgen of hope, split ourselves up into groups of two randomly, and set out on boats.

...It sounds simple when I wrote it like that, but before we got on the boats,

there were a number of difficulties. First off, Kuroha was dead set against the pairings.

“Miru and Sensei in the same boat?!” she exclaimed. “That’s like leaving out bait in front of some wild beast! I will not allow it. We’re going to decide the pairs again!”

“Then how about you ride together with Miru, Kuroha?” I asked. “Then that leaves Sensei together with the professor, and Yuzu-san together with me.”

Kuroha looked at me and Yuzu-san with concerned eyes. “...Th-That’s not gonna work, either! Whatever, let’s just draw straws again!”

We gave in and drew straws once again. It was quite a coincidence, but the results came up exactly the same, and so Kuroha reluctantly agreed.

But Kuroha still believed this put Miru in danger, so the professor let Miru borrow an invention of hers called the “Meguri Pen” for self defense. It looked like a cute, pink pen, but the professor said it was a tool used to dig tunnels for roads.

I wonder why she made it look like a pen?

Kuroha asked the professor if Miru could keep it from now on as an anti-Odaira countermeasure, and the professor happily agreed. Odaira-sensei stamped his feet and pouted.

When we went to rent the boats, another problem occurred. Both Odaira-sensei and Miru were little girls, so the employee wouldn’t rent them boats because he was afraid they would get in an accident.

“I didn’t see a sign saying there was an age requirement! Honestly, you are so inflexible!” complained Odaira-sensei, as we headed behind the building.

“Sorry to keep you waiting, Miru-chan,” he said, coming back once again in the form of a man. He was carrying a walking stick and was wearing a hat, looking the part of a British gentleman.

Odaira-sensei tried to explain to the employee that Miru and he were a very close brother and sister, but Miru said he was some old geezer she’d never seen before, which caused yet more trouble. In the end, somehow we managed to

rent the boats.

A little while after taking off in the boats, Odaira-sensei transformed back into a little girl, saying, “This is my true form, now.”

We rowed out onto the lake.

“Gin-san, the wind on the lake feels so nice, don’t you think? It’s like I’ve become a swan!” said Yuzu-san, sitting across from me. She looked like she was really enjoying herself.

It had been four days since Mr. Bedhead had stolen the “Meguri Gun” which could make the marshmallows. According to the professor, it took five days to make a batch of marshmallows, so we didn’t have much time left.

Gotta hurry.

If Mr. Bedhead finished the marshmallows, he would go back to the future and leave us all behind. If that happened, it would be all over for us.

After I said nothing, the smile on Yuzu-san’s face disappeared. She stayed quiet for a little bit after that, but then asked me something with a serious expression on her face.

“Gin-san, what do you think of Sadame-san?”

“What do I think? Well, his hair is pretty out there...”

Yuzu-san sputtered out a “That’s very much like you, Gin-san...”

“What do you think, Yuzu-san?” I asked.

“When I heard about him, I thought to myself that he was a lot like my brother.”

“I see,” I said. “Like how they both warped. Well, Mr. Bedhead used the marshmallows...”

“Oh, um, not that part.”

“Oh? Not that?” I figured it out. “I get it. It’s because Mr. Bedhead is also a little piggy.”

“I’m not sure what you mean by that... What I think is that my brother and Sadame-san had similar circumstances, even if their passions were different.”

Now that she puts it that way...

Yuzu-san's older brother had had a very gentlemanly love for moe, and he'd been an outcast at school because the people around him hadn't been able to understand his tastes. Mr. Bedhead's novels and the books of his beloved ancestor Torahiko Touji hadn't been understood by the world around him, either. That must be why Yuzu-san related the two in her mind.

"It would be good if there was a way we could have Mr. Bedhead be more accepted among his peers," I said. "If we change the world back to the way it was, that's not a world that would easily accept him, after all..."

A world which can accept anyone is not an easy thing.

I stopped rowing, and while I was deep in thought, Yuzu-san smiled kindly at me.

"Gin-san, you don't need to worry about it so much. We need to find Sadame-san and capture him first. I'm going to do everything I can to help you."

"You are?" I asked.

"That's right. I've been thinking about challenging myself to try new things..."

What is she talking about?

I was curious, but Yuzu-san just told me, "Look forward to it," and laughed.

"Yuzu-san, don't overdo it and hurt yourself, okay? But if you do get hurt, I'll give you first aid."

"Oh, thank you!" she cried.

"That's a good idea. Let's practice giving some first aid," I suggested.

"Practice?" she asked. "What should we do?"

"In one of Sensei's books, he wrote that 'Wounds should heal if you lick them.'"

"What?! You're going to lick me, Gin-san? D-Does it matter wh-where?"

"Anywhere is fine."

"O-Okay, th-then, you don't have to actually lick, but just press your lips

against me gently...” she said, and moved her cheek towards me with some conviction.

Hmm? Push my lips up against her cheek?

“Imose-kun,” said a voice from beside me. “Kuro-chan is emitting a strange aura right now-noda...”

The professor and Kuroha’s boat was right next to ours. The professor had mentioned a strange aura, and when I looked toward Kuroha...

Whoa! Kuroha was leaning over the side of her boat, staring at Yuzu-san and me through what looked like a pair of toy binoculars. They were probably one of the professor’s inventions.

If Kuroha was using binoculars to look up at us when she was so close, her vision must have gotten really bad. *Probably from all that reading.*

The professor chuckled a bit, but then caught herself as if she’d noticed something. I looked out to where she was peering, and, out far beyond the boat with Odaira-sensei and Miru, there was a single boat.

There was a person on the boat, wearing a hood that covered his head, but judging from the body type, it was probably a man. Since he had the hood on, it was hard to tell.

“Hmm, that might be him...” The professor nodded, then all of a sudden she jumped from her boat to the boat with Yuzu-san and me. Then she hugged me.

What are you thinking? Why are you hugging me?!

“Wh-What are you doing?!” I yelped.

“Sorry for being so sudden, but you see, I really love you, Imose-kun-noda!”

“Whaat?!” I exclaimed.

“I fell in love with you at first sight! Please, will you be my boyfriend?”

S-S-Say what?!

I’d been confessed to! But all the while the professor was yelling these climactic lines, her facial expression had been calm. You could say she was putting on an act.

“I’m way more little-sistery than Kuro-chan or Yuzu-cchi-noda! Choose me-noda!” The professor grabbed my arm and pulled it toward her chest.

Oh, she does have some roundness there... I was lost a bit in the realization that the child-like professor had some girly aspects to her.

“Gin-san, don’t forget that I’m your little sister, too!” Yuzu-san grabbed on to my other arm, as if to counter the professor.

Yuzu-san, you know your breasts are totally rubbing up against me, right?! Ooh, that side is nice and big and soft and...

“Stop tempting my Nii, you harpies! Geezer, put some back into it and catch up!” Miru and Odaira-sensei quickly caught up.

I felt a death stare, and turned to look in that direction. Kuroha had lowered her binoculars and was wearing a face of pure malice.

With everyone together, the professor took in a deep breath, and yelled out in a surprisingly loud voice, “You’re so popular, Imose-kun. It’s no wonder your dream is to become an orthodox style literature author-noda!”

She yelled it so loud that my ears hurt. *I can hear you fine without you screaming, you know!*

“You’re way different than that other someone who writes such icky books and just mopes around all day-noda!” she went on. “Books without beautiful girls are just garbage, and the people who write them are garbage too-noda! If you want to be popular, maybe you should read some of Odaira-sensei’s books-noda!”

Who is she talking about? No one here writes anything like that...

“There’s no point to changing the world-noda. It’ll just prove that people with no talent can’t do anything regardless-noda!” As the professor finished, she laughed in an exaggerated, “Hahahahahahaha!”

Suddenly...

“**S I L E N C E ! ! ! ! ! !**”

A great bellow reverberated across the lake’s surface.

Immediately afterward, there was a thunk as something rammed into the boat

we were on!

“Uwaaaaaa!” Our boat tilted over and we were about to fall into the water. Someone was rowing a boat that had rammed into the rear of our own. I looked back, and was met with the eyes of a young man.

His hair was pointing up, and his eyes had a sharp stare. He was wearing a cape, and had on what looked like an old fashioned military uniform. The fashion sense was so odd that I wondered to myself which men’s clothing store would sell such an outfit.

A coat with a hood was lying on the floor beside his feet. It was the same person that the professor had been looking at afar earlier. I knew this person. It was the first time we had met, but I had seen his picture before.

We found you! We finally found you!

“You fell for it, Aniki! Now then...” proclaimed the professor, laughing confidently as she jumped back into her original boat.

There was only one person who the professor would address as “Aniki”... her brother, Sadame Choumabayashi... *i.e.* Mr. Bedhead!

“Ahaha, you’re such an idiot for falling for our little act, Aniki-noda!” she laughed.

“Meguri, why you little...!” Mr. Bedhead was glaring at the professor with a fierce stare.

“So, you are Sadame Choumabayashi-san, yes?” I yelled, and he looked in my direction. “How do you do? My name is Gin Imose. Please give us back the manuscript and the Meguri Gun.”

“You foolish brat... Did you seriously think asking Myself nicely would get you what you want?” he demanded.

“No, I didn’t think you would give in without a fight, Mr. Bedhead.”

“B-B... This is not a bedhead! This is my ‘Literary Hair’!” Mr. Bedhead touched his hair.

“All great authors must have very distinct hair” is something people say, that’s true. *I see now. I can definitely understand that.*

“It doesn’t look good on you,” I said.

“Shut up! You have no right to criticize me when you are wearing such an outdated outfit!”

Huh? My SCHOOL UNIFORM is super classy, man!

“Outdated? Going by 23rd century tastes, your outfit is quite a number you know, Aniki-noda!” the professor declared.

“I prefer Gin-san’s reserved black uniform myself. I think it is wonderful,” added Yuzu-san.

“I can’t believe he refers to himself as ‘Myself.’ I mean, it’s one thing in a book, but to use that as a real person... It’s the first time I’ve ever encountered someone like that,” pondered Kuroha.

“Creep,” said Miru, simply.

“When Miru-chan calls you a ‘creep,’ that’s a great honor! I’m so jealous, I’ll never forgive you, Sadame-kun!” yelled Odaira-sensei.

We had all gathered together and were blasting Mr. Bedhead with all we had.

“Enough!!! Silence!!!” Mr. Bedhead had stamped his foot so hard his boat was rocking back and forth. He was clearly a very emotional person. As he was distracted, we had slowly proceeded with our plan.

“Aniki, you screwed up!” the professor announced. "Take a look: your boat is surrounded-noda!”

Before we had gotten on the boats, we had all planned to surround him if we ran into him. We had formed a triangle around him in the lake with Mr. Bedhead’s boat caught in the center.

“Mr. Bedhead, you cannot escape. Now, we are going to tie a rope to your boat and have you follow us!” I declared.

There was no response. He looked at our three boats and spoke in an unexpectedly calm voice.

“Hmph. You finally show yourselves, but I do not have the time to play with you right now.” He took out a small, white, round object from his coat.

—?! That’s a time traveling marshmallow!

“They’re already finished?!” I exclaimed.

“That shouldn’t be possible-noda. It’s too fast for them to be completed-noda!” said the professor, flabbergasted. “Aniki, you didn’t... You used a smaller amount of the ingredients and made them extra quickly?! It’s true they’d be ready in less time, but...”

“Little sister of mine, and all the rest of you followers of Gai Odaira... Wander for the rest of your lives, trapped in this era!” he shouted.

“Stop, Aniki!” she cried back. “If you eat marshmallows that are incomplete, then...”

Mr. Bedhead ignored the pleas of the professor, and popped the marshmallow into his mouth.

My vision was filled with blinding white light. A wave of light burst out from Mr. Bedhead’s boat. A beam heading upwards reached up into the heavens, and the blast wave along the surface of the lake caused waves to appear. The large waves rocked out boats back and forth violently, and we all lost our balance and

fell over.

“Ugh...” I somehow lifted up my head. *Has Mr. Bedhead already traveled through time?* I looked over at the boat he was in...

I gasped and stood up. Everyone else also stood back up and looked over, dumbfounded.

He was still there.

What used to be Mr. Bedhead was still there. It must have been a side effect from eating an incomplete time traveling marshmallow. Not a single trace was left of the former form of Mr. Bedhead. His body had been changed beyond all recognition.

He spread his wide, dark black wings, and opened up his big, suspicious-looking eyes. He had a slender body, thin in some places, and overflowing in other places... It was a tragic transformation into a different form.

Not a single trace of his original form was left... If Odaira-sensei were to describe it in one of his books, he would surely say something like this:

GIRL

Mr. Bedhead had been transformed completely into a young, pretty girl. He looked to be about eight years old. His bangs were cut and he had short, bobbed hair that matched his youthful looks. He was wearing an old-fashioned type of gym uniform called bloomers, which was something that you would only see in the 23rd century on 2D characters.

Honestly speaking, he was quite cute...

“Ahh, I tried to warn you-noda...”

“Wh-Wh-What is the meaning of this?!” Mr. Bedhead had realized from our reaction something was wrong and had looked down at himself. The most unique feature was the bat wings that had sprouted out from his back.

“Ooooooooooohhhhhhhhhh!” Odaira-sensei exclaimed. “Gym clothes, bloomers, and wings! I can’t stand it anymore!” He jumped into Mr. Bedhead’s boat, gunning straight for him. “Give me those bloomers! I want to put them on

my head!”

“S-Stop it!” Mr. Bedhead screamed.

Odaira-sensei's fingers pulled down on Mr. Bedhead's bloomers, and Mr. Bedhead aimed a swift kick in his direction.

"Hahaha! You say a lot of things, Sadame-kun, but it seems you like pretty little girls after all!" teased Odaira-sensei, as he deftly jumped back to his own boat, twin-tails fluttering all the while.

"You're a poser," sniped Miru.

"Those gym clothes look very good on you!" added Yuzu-san, quite sincerely.

"Professor, is that some kind of side effect?" asked Kuroha, who was calmly assessing the situation, unlike everyone else.

"That's right-noda," she agreed. "It's like how Odaira-sensei's love for beautiful girls turned him into one. In this case, my brother's resentment toward moe caused his transformation-noda!"

"And the wings?" Kuroha asked. "Are they some kind of personification of his wicked intent?"

"I suppose that's possible, but if I were to give my opinion as a scientist..." The professor drew out the suspense with a long pause. "...I'd just call it an added bonus!"

"...It's going to be quite a troublesome bonus if he flies away!" Kuroha shouted.

Uh, that would be really bad, wouldn't it?

If only I could simply grow tentacles and wrap them all around the bloomer-wearing girl that is now Mr. Bedhead, much like the religious art I saw in the museum... But I highly doubt the professor would have an invention to do that...

As I was pondering, Kuroha looked over and gave me a signal. She must have been planning something about Mr. Bedhead.

"You have faith in old literature, yes? I read modern literature as well," said Kuroha.

"...So you do, black-haired girl?" answered Mr. Bedhead.

I get it! Kuroha is gonna talk to Mr. Bedhead and distract him. And maybe...

Perhaps I was being naive, but I thought if she could convince him we were right, then maybe we wouldn't have to do anything rough like capture him at all. He would return the manuscript and we could all go back to the future together.

All right, let's all persuade him!

"I prefer modern literature to the orthodox style myself. But I don't have the hatred you do for it. I'm not going to go changing history, you know?" explained Kuroha.

"Hmph. Such was the only course of action. In order to set literature back on the correct path, merely changing the literary world would be insufficient. The very roots must be pulled up and replanted."

"The roots?" she asked. "What do you mean?"

"Culture. And that which gives rise to culture... education."

"Education, you say?" I couldn't help but to cut in.

Mr. Bedhead turned to look at me. "Literature... No, not just literature... It was the decay in this country's schools and educational system which truly set our culture along such a regrettable course. The establishment of that kind of education is what seeded the soil in which the banality of the orthodox style could take root."

"The orthodox style is not banal!" I said hotly. "And the school system hasn't decayed!"

"Silence, brat! You should know the difference in school between the two time periods. Compare in your mind the schools of the 21st and 23rd centuries. You must see how far the schools have degenerated, no?!" As if to emphasize his horror, Mr. Bedhead's wings spread out wide.

Compare the schools? I didn't want to just do whatever he told me to, but if I was going to try and convince him, I at least needed to be able to counter what he was saying. I thought back to the experiences I had had in school, both in the 21st century and the 23rd century...

"So, do you have anything to say for yourself, brat?" he demanded.

"I think the schools in the 23rd century are perfectly fine," I said. "What's

wrong with them?”

“What do you mean, fine?! The teachers are no longer of flesh and blood, and the role is now borne by 2D girls that are nothing but products of a machine. There is even the horrid system for rewarding correct answers with a flash of women’s drawers, the ‘positive stimulation reinforcement,’ *i.e.* ‘postimment.’ Could it get any more degenerate?! I think not!”

“The 2D teacher can be created to each student’s individual tastes, so we can study while we talk with them,” I shot back. “Isn’t it important to nurture each student’s individualism? And the reward videos help to motivate people to study!”

“Stop spouting such sophistry!” he snapped. “It is due to the persistence of that kind of *education* that people of proper intelligence and tastes are no longer raised! In the 23rd century there are nothing but imbeciles and ignoramuses!”

Mr. Bedhead shouted out angrily, but it was not me who responded.

“That’s not true! There are educated people even in the 23rd century!” said Kuroha, and Mr. Bedhead turned his piercing gaze toward her.

“Oh? Black-haired girl, are you telling me that you are properly educated?”

“That’s not what I meant to say exactly, but I might be better than you, at least,” she said.

“Hmph. Then how about we test that education of yours, shall we?”

Test her education? What is he suggesting? I hope this doesn’t get too crazy...

Mr. Bedhead stuck his hands into his bloomers and pulled out a book to show Kuroha. *The title is* **よねこの漢字問題集** (Kanji Workbook for Children)*... I can’t even read that hiragana!*

“This is a workbook for children to teach them kanji. Try reading it,” said Mr. Bedhead, as if challenging her, and he flipped it open to a certain page. Written on the page were three kanji.

鯖　鰤　鯵

What the... I couldn’t help but look. *What in the world are those?! I’m pretty*

sure they're kanji, but they've got to be some kind of super-ultra specialized kanji, right? They've got so many strokes, and they look like some kind of ancient language or spell or something. This isn't something you'd learn in school, it's advanced research level!

Even Kuroha would surely not be able to read such difficult kanji. This was not a good situation. But...

"'Saba' (mackerel), 'buri' (yellowtail), 'aji' (horse mackerel)." Kuroha read each one in turn.

"It can't be!" exclaimed Mr. Bedhead, with an expression that matched the line. He must never have imagined that Kuroha could have been able to read them.

"Ahaha... You go on about education but you just end up quizzing her on kanji. You're just ever so proud of those facts you crammed into your brain, Aniki. You have such a narrow worldview-noda," laughed the professor.

"Reading Nii's prose is way harder," added Miru.

Hold on a sec. This might not seem hard to everyone else, but for a normal person in the 23rd century like me, this is a pretty damn high-level competition!

Mr. Bedhead paid no heed to the peanut gallery, and proceeded to the next question. "Not bad, black-haired girl... Then, how about this!"

官能

"Whaa?!" Kuroha was flustered.

"Sadame-kun, that is a strange question to ask, isn't it? I find it odd that it would appear in a book aimed at children, but..." asked Odaira-sensei.

"That's a book he wrote himself-noda," answered the professor. "He just made it to show off all the old words he knows-noda."

"Ah, that would explain it. He must have had quite a lot of free time to make something like that."

The professor and Odaira-sensei were having a casual conversation, and it was almost as if they were having a nice cup of tea together, watching Kuroha and Mr. Bedhead face off.

“Come now, black-haired girl!” he challenged. “Can you not read this?”

“I-I can read it! ... *Kannou*...”

“Nee... What does *kannou* mean?” asked Miru, ever so pure.

“I-I-It means...”

“Come on, tell me!”

“It means to feel sexual pleasure, something like that, okay?!” yelled out Kuroha, who couldn’t have been more upset about having to say it aloud.

Mr. Bedhead let out a mocking laugh. “Is that it, black-haired girl? In the end, you know nothing more than the surface meaning of kanji. In fact, *kannou* means the operation of the human sensory organs such as the ears, eyes, etc...”

“...Huh? Really?” Even Odaira-sensei didn’t seem to know this.

“Nee’s read way too many of those *kannou* books in our library,” pointed out Miru. Kuroha’s face went red from cheek to cheek.

“If you’re saying something like that... Miru, you knew what it meant all along, and you were just teasing me!”

“Kuroha, you need to translate one of those *kannou* novels and read it to me. We can have a brother-sister *kannou* novel recitation!” I suggested.

“I-I don’t read th-those kind of books, all right?!” blurted out Kuroha.

Oh, she’s totally read them all right.

After that Mr. Bedhead kept asking her more questions, but Kuroha got them all correct.

“Aniki, it’s no use-noda.” The professor tried to get him to stop. “Kuro-chan walks around with a dictionary under her arm. That’s just how hard she studies. She can read more kanji than you can-noda.”

“Kuroha-san, you walk around carrying a dictionary because you want to make sure you can completely support the person who needs it here in the 21st century, right?” asked Yuzu-san.

Hearing this, I was taken aback. *Kuroha was walking around with a dictionary all the time because of me? I had no idea...* I looked over at Kuroha with a

mixture of happiness and embarrassment.

“D-Don’t get any wrong ideas, Onii-chan. I just wanted to memorize vocabulary, that’s all.” Kuroha was blushing ever-so-slightly, and didn’t look me directly in the eyes. She started to fidget with her hair, which was a habit of hers when she got embarrassed.

“Do you get it, Aniki? You can’t beat Imose-kun. And the reason why is...” The professor put her hands on her hips, and finished the sentence with exaggerated conviction. “...because your little sister doesn’t have enough feelings for you!”

“Meguri... Why you little...” Mr. Bedhead writhed like a beast.

Umm, Professor? I think you are actually making him more angry...

The furious Mr. Bedhead turned his boat toward Kuroha and the professor’s boat and charged forward. Even in the body of a little girl, he was able to row pretty fast! The boats crashed into one another.

“Kyaaaaa!” “Uwa!”

Kuroha and the professor’s boat rocked violently, and the two who had been standing fell on their butts. Kuroha’s dictionary and the professor’s pouch flew up into the air, strewing pieces of paper and gadgets along the floor of the boat.

“Mr. Bedhead! That’s your own little sister! What if she falls overboard and drowns?!” I yelled.

“Who cares if we’re related by blood?” he shouted. “I, Myself, shall forgive no one who mocks me, even be it my own sister!”

“I don’t want anyone lecturing me on schools or education who can’t even treasure their own family!”

“As if you knew anything at all, you brat!” he snarled.

Odaira-sensei tried to calm down the seething Mr. Bedhead. “Sadame-kun, if we are going to argue theory, then let us narrow it down to the subject of literature. Is that not for the best?”

“That’s right, Mr. Bedhead. I don’t really know about education or school stuff. Let’s talk about literature instead. Why do you hate orthodox style literature so much?” I asked.

Mr. Bedhead shut his mouth tightly. It seemed like he had listened to us and was thinking about how to respond. After a bit, he answered, once again in the mood to argue.

“First off, there are those frivolous illustrations. Why must novels have pictures like that? That’s proof right there that their prose is weak!”

“You’ve gotta have pictures,” said Miru.

“Miru’s totally right!” I agreed. “With the illustrations, it’s way easier to visualize the characters!”

“It should be the words themselves that evoke people’s imaginations,” he snapped. “The power of a picture is unnecessary.”

“But it’s because of the pictures that panty flash scenes and scenes where people get naked stand out!” I protested.

Mr. Bedhead’s eyes lit up. “Yes! That’s exactly it! That’s the part that I will never, ever accept! To titillate the reader with a frivolous showing of skin or underwear is the banal and degenerate filth that I am talking about!”

Well, you can say that, but... To someone like me who had been basically raised on panty flashes, they didn’t seem like degenerate filth to me at all.

“And what’s more, it is usually an image of a girl whose age is far outside the boundaries of the acceptable who is the subject of such foolishness,” he added. “It’s clear proof of the immaturity of the one writing it.”

“You’re now a little girl too, you know,” said Miru.

Mr. Bedhead considered the implications of what Miru just said and responded, “This body is hardly proof of my own immaturity!”

“Hearing all this hatred toward panty flashes of little girls makes me want to show you one even more! Sadame-kun, look at this!” yelled Odaira-sensei, flipping up his skirt. For just a moment, I could see a miniature universe in white.

“D-Don’t show me such inelegant undergarments!” I was quite moved, but Mr. Bedhead turned his cute little head and shut his eyes, as if something unsanitary was about to get in them.

He has no sense of the value of things, does he?

Odaira-sensei kept flipping his skirt again and again, prodding with, “How about this?! How about this?!”

Each time Mr. Bedhead would strike an exaggerated pose and yell, “Stop it!”

He must be quite conscientious to make sure to respond to Odaira-sensei every time like that.

“They’re both actually guys on the inside, you know? This is pretty surreal to watch...” sighed Kuroha.

I think it’s something I should treasure witnessing.

“I had no idea that a little girl showing another little girl her panties could feel so good! Sadame-kun, hurry up and strip off those bloomers and show me your panties, too!” suggested Odaira-sensei.

“Did you hear that, brat?!” Mr. Bedhead exclaimed. “This is the Odaira that stands at the pinnacle of the orthodox style. A person as vulgar as him cannot help but to write vulgar novels!”

“Mr. Bedhead, what are you saying?” I protested. “Panty flashes are the symbol of the orthodox style. Sensei is opening up his soul to you!”

“Soul? Hardly! The orthodox style has no soul! It is the very definition of hollow!” he snapped.

What?! “How can you say that it doesn’t have a soul?! The orthodox style is nothing but soul itself!”

“The stories are flimsy and they’ve lost all humanity. They have no message or theme! And worst of all, their prose is infantile!”

No matter how impeccable his logic, I couldn’t accept it. “And now I know how little you really understand orthodox style literature,” I replied.

“What?”

“Ever since the time of *Oniaka* through current-day literature, having a strong story has been considered a minus. Rather than a story, what is important is to have ‘situations.’ Rather than humanity, strong characters are important. The story’s message is left for the reader to freely interpret as they wish, so putting one in too strongly is a no-no. As for prose, I can only say that different eras call

for different styles.”

“You are a fool, brat, for suggesting that the orthodox style is so commonplace. It is because it has been overrun with such rubbish that literature is dead!”

“It is not dead!” I cried. “The way that literature is valued has changed, that’s all! For example, in current literature, saying a book has ‘a strong theme’ is a criticism!”

“Are you saying that the more idiotic, the better?!” he shouted.

“No, that’s not it! What I’m saying is that what you think is idiotic might not be to people from the 23rd century!”

“You basically grew up in our library, Aniki. Your thinking is way off from normal people-noda,” added the professor.

“Here’s an example, Sadame-kun,” prodded Odaira-sensei. “Say a person who lived in the time period of the *Man’yoshu* came to the Meiji or Taisho era and criticized your precious Torahiko Touji’s works. They’d say, ‘It’s weird that he uses these letters that aren’t kanji, and I can’t relate to how the characters are thinking.’”

“Every one of you, cease with this inanity! There is not a single virtue to the orthodox style! It is nothing but a plague given rise by the vagaries of time!” yelled Mr. Bedhead, his angelic white cheeks flushing red.

“It’s not just some random occurrence! And it has virtue! It’s easy to read and understand! It’s fun! That’s exactly why it’s spread around the world and become the heart of literature!” I argued.

“You will never convince me! The orthodox style is not literature! It is the literature of my ancestors which is right and true! And I, Myself, must take my ancestor’s literature and cause it to be reborn!”

He’s stubborn. Nothing will get through. It probably won’t matter what we say... But it couldn’t be helped. Just as I had said, the value of literature has changed too much from modern literature to current-day. It was hopeless to think we could come to some agreement. No matter how I explained the wonders of the orthodox style, Mr. Bedhead would never be able to understand.

In that case...

“I understand. Both the orthodox style and the literature which you love so much are valuable,” I said. “They are different, so there is no point in saying one is superior to another. Isn’t that good enough?”

“Don’t be ridiculous, brat! Of course one is better than the other! The literature of my ancestors is superior! Its beautiful prose and complex story... The artistry which separates it from the crowd... The orthodox style cannot hold a candle to it!”

“I won’t reject your literature, Mr. Bedhead,” I said. “But my love for the orthodox style is unchanged. I believe that each might be completely different from one another, but both of them have value in the same way!”

“Don’t even compare them!” he screamed. “My ancestor’s literature and the orthodox style the same? You make me retch!”

To Mr. Bedhead, the literature of Torahiko Touji was perfect and amazing, and it wasn’t looking like he would ever accept the orthodox style. *This is gonna take a lot of work to convince him...*

As I was trying to come up with a strategy, the professor leaned toward him. “Sheesh-noda. I wasn’t planning on saying this, but... Aniki, I’m gonna tell you something good-noda.”

“Something good?”

“It happened before you screwed everything up-noda. After I made the time traveling marshmallows, I broke my own rules, just once-noda.” The professor narrowed her eyebrows. I looked in closely as well. “The rule I broke was ‘Never go to the future.’ But I lost to my curiosity, and went to take a look-noda. All the way to the 38th century.”

The 38th century... That would be over 1,500 years since our 23rd century. I wasn’t even able to imagine what kind of world it would be.

“Japan in the 38th century was amazing-noda. Not only did Japanese not use kanji, it didn’t even use hiragana or katakana anymore. The Japanese of the 38th century used only symbols and numbers-noda.”

“Only symbols and numbers? Don’t be ridiculous,” scoffed Mr. Bedhead.

“But it gets even more surprising-noda,” she went on. “What we call the prime minister now was a pair of pantyhose. Not a 2D character wearing pantyhose-noda. The pantyhose itself-noda.”

None of us could hide our shock.

“The pantyhose faction was just one of the three major political forces, which also included the Kneesocks Party and the Leggings Party.”

So there are still political parties that far into the future?!

....Ah! “...Professor, don’t tell me the name of pantyhose faction... It wasn’t...”

“If I translated it into our words, it would be called... the ‘PantyHose-Party.’”

I knew it! Those people from the future totally get it!

“Ugh, that pun is like something a lonely pervert would think up,” muttered Kuroha.

“Nii, Meguri just wanted to say ‘Hose-Party,’” explained Miru.

“Hey, I’m not some old man making bad jokes! It really was called the ‘PantyHose-Party’-noda!” complained the professor.

“So, what were the humans like in the future?” I asked.

“There were... human-shaped ones, at least-noda.”

“Oh, I see.” I supposed they’d had heads and limbs, at least.

“Meguri, what the hell are you trying to say?” demanded Mr. Bedhead.

“Even in such a radically changed 38th century, they still passed down ancient works of literature,” the professor said. “Looking back at literature written using kanji or kana from that far in the future, there wasn’t any difference between the two-noda. They were treated as essentially the same-noda.”

Mr. Bedhead looked ever so slightly surprised.

“Even the orthodox style literature that you hate so much and the modern literature which you love are all lumped into the same category of ‘ancient literature,’ and are considered pretty much the same,” she went on.

“Ancient literature? I cannot believe it...” Mr. Bedhead was incredulous.

“What do you think, Imose-kun-noda?” asked the professor.

“Well, it’s really far into the future,” I said. “If you say it’s that way, maybe it is?”

“Looks like you believe me-noda!” the professor cried.

“As if such a future would exist! Is there no limit to your mockery?!” her brother shouted.

“Here’s the proof-noda.” The professor gathered up the piece of paper that had fallen into the boat and showed it to Mr. Bedhead. I was at a bad angle and couldn’t see what was written on it.

“...? What is this? Something from that other girl?” he asked.

“Huh? Oh, my bad. It’s this one.” The professor picked up a different page and showed it to Mr. Bedhead.

“What is the meaning of this?!” Mr. Bedhead looked as if he was in a state of total shock.

“This is what literature in the future looks like-noda. Now that you see this, don’t you realize the pointlessness of arguing over whether the literature of the 23rd century is ‘right’ or ‘wrong,’ Aniki?”

I wonder what was written on the paper she showed him? It must have been writing from the 38th century, right?

“That’s just something you came up with on your own,” said Mr. Bedhead, dismissively.

“You can believe me or not. It’s up to you-noda. But if I’d had the time to go writing something like this, you know I’d have spent it on my hobbies or research-noda.”

Mr. Bedhead had no response to that. He pressed his lips together and peered closely at her. The usually-quick-to-argue Mr. Bedhead was silent. He must have sensed something.

Perhaps what I said is finally getting to him? Maybe we could convince him,

after all!

“Mr. Bedhead, I know that you hate the orthodox style, but isn’t it better to promote the things you love instead?” I asked. “Think back to the reason you decided to become an author. I’m sure it’s because you had a noble wish, or someone you wanted to be like...”

“Listen to Imose-kun, Aniki-noda,” the professor agreed. “The reason that Imose-kun wanted to write stories was for his little sister Kuro-chan-noda. As for me, it’s not like I’m going to go crazy when I heard it was ‘for his little sister,’ but it did make me think, ‘That’s nice’-noda.”

Kuroha looked at me with surprise in her eyes.

Oh, that’s right! While I was talking with the professor about the past, Kuroha was passed out, drunk. It’s kind of embarrassing.

Mr. Bedhead opened his mouth as if to say something back, but the professor continued on.

“You were moved by our ancestor’s writing, right? I can’t sympathize with you, nor do I want to, but I can understand being moved by something and how that can be your motivation-noda.”

“Don’t forget how you felt that day!” I pushed. “It’s true that in a world filled with the orthodox style, it might be difficult for your work to be accepted. But wasn’t there just *Usubi,* which was nominated for the Homyura Prize? If you keep trying your best, one day your novels will surely come out into the light!”

“Silence!” Mr. Bedhead shouted. “I don’t need you people to tell me what my goals are! That’s precisely why I must change the future!”

“Ahaha... I figured we couldn’t convince you,” the professor laughed. “I can understand how you feel-noda. Compared to Imose-kun here, it would be way harder for your books to be accepted-noda. It’s no wonder you’re so unsatisfied.”

I had thought that Mr. Bedhead would respond to the professor with more rage, but instead he blurted out a simple, “Wrong...”

“I’m not wrong-noda. After all, you say a lot of stuff about education and how

great you are, but it's basically just about how jealous and coveting you are-noda. You want your talent to be accepted just as much as orthodox style literature, and you want to be popular with girls. That's all it is in the end-noda!"

"I said you were wrong!" he snapped.

"But you're too much of a coward to go out in the world when you set the bar so high, so, like a coward, you changed the world instead of trying to change yourself-noda," the professor said. "A person like that won't amount to anything no matter what they do-noda. They won't create anything-noda!"

"Stop this!" Mr. Bedhead couldn't even tell her she was wrong anymore. Everything she said must have been a direct hit.

But, Professor, we're not trying to back Mr. Bedhead into a corner, we're trying to persuade him...

I've gotta think... Why is Mr. Bedhead so hard-headed about this?

If there had been a reader who could understand his writing, things would have been different. "Amazing, interesting, this time it wasn't so good, but try again next time..." If there had at least been someone to say these sorts of things, Mr. Bedhead would be able to listen to other people's opinions, at least a little bit. But there were almost no people who could read the modern literature that Mr. Bedhead wrote.

.....!

"There is someone!" I exclaimed. *That's right, there is. There is a person who can read his works, very very close to him right now!* "Kuroha, I want you to read something Mr. Bedhead wrote and tell him what you think of it, right now! I'd read it myself if I could, but I can't."

"Huh?" Kuroha didn't know what to make of my sudden request.

"Mr. Bedhead was just ignored or teased by everyone around him and he got really sulky. Isn't that really sad? But you can understand him, Kuroha!" I exclaimed.

"I am not sulky!" Mr. Bedhead arched his small body back in rage, like a little monkey.

“I’m not sure that Sadame-san would be very happy if I read them,” Kuroha hedged.

“That’s not true! Come on, Kuroha, please!” I pleaded.

“Fine, if you insist. I’ll read it, but we should read it together, Onii-chan. I’ll translate it for you.”

When Kuroha said the words “read it together,” Yuzu-san and Miru both reacted.

“Kuroha-san, it’s not fair to read it only with Gin-san. I will read it, as well!” said Yuzu-san.

“I’m a gonna read it, too!” said Miru.

Everyone will read it! Sounds like fun!

“Let’s go to a park or something and everyone read it together!” I exclaimed in a boisterous tone.

“Then I’ll make everyone lunch boxes. How does ginger-pork sound to you?” asked Yuzu-san.

“I’ll draw pictures for it,” said Miru.

In my head I was picturing a scene where we had laid out a picnic blanket and were all sitting in a park, reading Mr. Bedhead’s novel, having fun...

Oh, yeah! In that case, he should come along, too!

“Mr. Bedhead, we’re going to be reading your novel, so would you come, too?” I asked. “You don’t have to be lonely anymore. Let’s all have fun together. So, just give back what you stole.”

Mr. Bedhead was leaning over and visibly shaking.

Is he overtaken with emotion? All right! It looks like we’ve finally persuaded him!

Mr. Bedhead raised up his head. It seems that I’d been naive. His brows were furled and his eyes were bloodshot with fury. “How dare you try to console me, you brat?!”

W-Why are you so mad? Maybe our suggestion really hurt his pride or

something...

Mr. Bedhead began to flap his wings and rose up into the sky.

Bloomers... The bloomers have lift-off!

We've failed! Is Mr. Bedhead trying to escape? This is bad! We haven't gotten back the manuscript of Ani MAJI Mania *or the Meguri Gun yet!*

But then...

"Gin-san, I've got this!" Next to me Yuzu-san had pulled out a rope. A loop had been tied on one end.

Ah! So the special trick she was working on before was lassoing!

Yuzu-san held the lasso in both hands, and braced herself. "Here I go!"

This was a completely different Yuzu-san than I had ever seen before. She had the look in her eyes of a hunter stalking her prey. As she spun the lasso around and around, she fixed her aim.

"Take this!" she shouted, throwing the lasso. The end of the lasso flew out and landed around Mr. Bedhead's neck.

Amazing, Yuzu-san!

“I did it! Now we just need to...” Yuzu-san pulled the rope back. Mr. Bedhead tried to take off the lasso from his neck, but it didn’t look like he’d be able to counter the strength of Yuzu-san’s pull downward. He was barely able to pull the rope out from around his neck at all.

“I’ll help you!” I grabbed the rope and pulled it together with Yuzu-san. The rope wrapped snugly around Mr. Bedhead’s neck.

“Guweh!!” Mr. Bedhead fell back down like a fly after it had been sprayed with bug spray. He splashed into the lake. We quickly surrounded the tightly bound little girl that was Mr. Bedhead. Yuzu-san’s passionate hobby was truly something.

“How pitiful! You thought you could fly away in the end-noda!” the professor laughed.

“I was not running away! I was ascending so that I could attack! I was going to divebomb you all!” he snarled.

“Sadame-kun, why don’t you consider staying in the form of a little girl permanently? I’d love to see you undo that wedgie you have going there,” suggested Odaira-sensei.

“You’re making me sick! I’d rather die!” Even while tightly bound, Mr. Bedhead was still exchanging fighting words with Odaira-sensei.

I respect his spirit.

“You’ve sure caused a lot of trouble.” I breathed a sigh of relief.

It had been an hour since we’d captured Mr. Bedhead. But there was one thing we had not anticipated. He wasn’t carrying the manuscript for *Ani MAJI Mania* or the Meguri Gun.

“Aniki, just give up already and tell us where you hid them-noda,” the professor said.

“I will not,” Mr. Bedhead snapped.

“You can’t return to the 23rd century as long as we have you tied up, you know-noda?” she pointed out.

“The future has been corrected. Even if I have to sacrifice Myself, I will have still accomplished my righteous goal.”

“Righteous-noda? You think that we’ve lost, then?”

“Miru-chan, can you think of a way to set this bloomer-wearing girl on the straight-and-narrow?” asked Odaira-sensei.

Miru looked hard at Mr. Bedhead. “We can lock the geezer and Sadame in a closet together,” she whispered.

“Wh-What?!” Mr. Bedhead screamed in a high-pitched voice.

Odaira-sensei’s eyes sparkled. “That’s an excellent idea! Sadame-kun, prepare yourself!”

Mr. Bedhead turned a shade of blue.

“I mean, you’re just so enticing! This is way better than erotic manga! All reason has completely left me!” The fingers on both of Odaira-sensei’s hands wriggled like little bug antennae. He slowly, creepily, approached Mr. Bedhead.

Mr. Bedhead pulled his head back at first from the approaching Odaira-sensei, but then his expression returned to one of staunch pride. “Do as you wish. If you wish to do embarrassing things to me, I will bite my tongue and endure them!”

“Are you sure? If you return the things you stole, we’ll let you go.”

“I said, do as you wish!” Mr. Bedhead shook his head back and forth, making his refusal clear. Odaira-sensei returned to being serious.

“Even after threatening you this much, you won’t budge, huh? Sadame-kun, you really are strong-willed,” he said.

“What? You were just bluffing? I thought you were serious,” I said.

“Well, I was half serious,” said Odaira-sensei, laughing.

If we couldn’t threaten him, then we had to talk it out of him somehow.

“How about we all return to the future, Mr. Bedhead?” I asked. “I’ll read your novel.”

“Don’t be ridiculous, brat! You just want to feel superior after besting Myself! I’d rather die right here than be taken pity upon by the likes of you!” He looked up at me with a cold stare.

Why do I get the feeling like he hates me especially?

“Don’t get so full of yourself, brat,” he sneered. “The reason people like your work isn’t because you have talent or because your works are so full of humanity. It’s only because you lived in a world where the orthodox style was accepted. When it comes to talent, mine is far superior to yours. Not just yours, but Odaira’s as well.”

“Uh, people don’t really like my works, actually...” I said.

“As far as my brother is concerned, you’re surrounded by girls and are a favorite of Odaira-sensei. It’s no wonder he’s jealous of you-noda,” said the professor.

“I am not jealous!” Mr. Bedhead shouted. “I’m just stating the facts! I have far more talent!”

“Guess we’re at an impasse,” she said. “Might as well throw you in a closet or something-noda.”

We all exchanged glances, in agreement that we had no choice but to forcibly coerce him. At this rate, we would never be able to return to the future.

What’ll we do?

Just then Odaira-sensei, who had snuck up next to Mr. Bedhead, spoke in a calm voice. “Sadame-kun, you really think that you are better than us, don’t you?”

“Of course I do,” he said coldly.

“In that case, why don’t we have a contest to settle this, once and for all?” Odaira-sensei’s eyes lit up like a child playing a prank on someone.

“A contest, you say?” Odaira-sensei had piqued Mr. Bedhead’s interest.

“Correct,” Odaira-sensei said. “You’re remaking Torahiko Touji’s *The 21st Century*, are you not? Do you happen to have the manuscript with you?”

“...I do. What of it?”

“That’ll do nicely. We can go on with the contest straight away. How about we put both your *The 21st Century* and our *Ani MAJI Mania* in Yuzu-kun’s treasure box?”

Put two manuscripts in her treasure box?! It was a proposal I could not have predicted. *After all, Sensei, if we do that, then...*

“It may well be that Gura will be moved by your *The 21st Century* and use it as the basis to write something, which will in turn cause the future to go in a very different direction,” he continued.

Do you hear what you’re saying? The future might change to something completely different!

“Of course he may choose *Ani MAJI Mania* and end up writing *Oniaka*. Or he could write something completely different, as well. It would all be in the hands of the god himself, Gura.”

“Hmm...” Mr. Bedhead’s mood had begun to shift. His stubborn expression from before had started to soften a little.

“I also agree with this suggestion-noda,” said the professor. “Aniki, I promise you that once we go back to the future, I won’t make any more marshmallows and will never set foot in the past again, no matter what the outcome-noda.”

No matter how the future might change, there would be no regrets. Everything would be settled by this one contest. After thinking it over for a little bit, Mr. Bedhead gave us his answer.

“So be it.”

We had entered into an agreement with our wartime foe, Mr. Bedhead. He would tell us where the manuscript for *Ani MAJI Mania* and the Meguri Gun were, and in exchange we would untie him. We were told that he had buried the manuscript and gun in a hole that he had dug below a torii gate near the lake. I had never actually seen a torii gate outside of shrine-maiden type anime, but it seems like there were plenty still around in this time period.

We headed toward the torii where they were hidden, lead by Mr. Bedhead, all

of us walking on the sandy lake beach. Mr. Bedhead had returned to his original form, and only his hands were tied behind his back.

Enough time had passed that evening was already beginning to fall. I could see the reflection of the orange sun wavering on the surface of the lake. *What a pretty view. I need to make sure to record this to my memories...*

Kuroha asked me a question as we walked beside each other. “Hey, Onii-chan... Are you really okay with Sensei’s idea? I’m against it. In the end, it’s just a gamble, you know?”

“It is, but... If we hadn’t suggested something like that, he would have never told us the hiding place...”

“But the risk is way too big! There’s no turning back afterward, you know?!” Kuroha’s voice rose in frustration and she stopped walking. I had no choice really but to stop walking, as well. It seemed like everyone had paused.

“It’s okay,” I said. “I believe in the work that we all created. I believe in *Ani MAJI Mania*. I just know that Gura will write *Oniaka*.”

“Can you really say that, for 100% sure?” she demanded.

I paused. It was true that I could not predict how the future would end up. For example, if it was Mr. Bedhead’s book that deeply impressed Gura and he wrote a novel based on that influence, the future might end up just like Mr. Bedhead’s dream for it. *If that happens, then...*

“What will you do if the world becomes filled with kanji?” Kuroha asked. “Think clearly, Onii-chan.”

“If that happens, I’ll accept it,” I said.

What Mr. Bedhead had done was wrong, but it was a fact that our future was not one where the literature that he loved so much would be accepted. To me, it was my beloved, peerless orthodox style. But to Mr. Bedhead, it was an evil empire that oppressed all opposition. If Gura ended up not writing *Oniaka*, and the future ended up following Mr. Bedhead... it would be a sign from God that the oppression of the evil empire must stop.

“So then you’ll give up on your dream?” asked Kuroha.

“...Of course not.” Only a little while ago, I might have given up. But now I could no longer even consider it. “I have to follow my own advice I gave Mr. Bedhead. ‘If you keep trying your best, one day your novels will surely come out into the light!’”

Kuroha heaved a heavy sigh, “Don’t say it like it’ll be easy...”

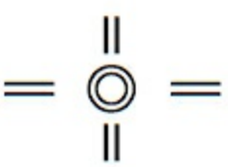
“No matter what situation I’m in, I’ll still believe in the literature I love,” I explained. “That’s why I believe that Gura will write *Oniaka*, and why even if he doesn’t, I will still believe in myself and never give up. That’s what I’ve decided!”

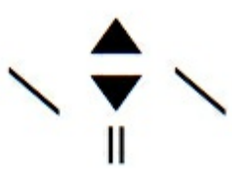
Kuroha scrunched up her eyebrows and pursed her lips. She clearly had something to say, but was holding back... That was the kind of face she was making. Then, someone was pulling on my clothes.

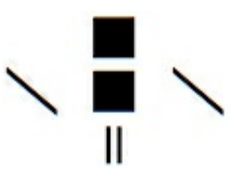
“Nii, if the world’s filled with kanji, you’ll be okay,” said a voice from down and to my side. I looked over and saw Miru holding a piece of paper in her hand. “I picked up this page that fell.” She held it out like some kind of diploma, and I accepted it.

What did she mean by it’ll be okay even if the world is filled with kanji? What is written on this paper? I looked down at it.

Declaration of Resolve!







I am writing this memo so that I never forget my resolve. What will you do if

we can't go back to the future, Onii-chan? Will you give up on your dream? Don't worry. I won't let you give up. I'm going to master modern Japanese. I'm going to take the prose you write and translate it for you. We'll make our debut together! Won't that be wonderful?

When I think about the possibility that we can't return to the future, I get really worried. But you'll be here with me, and as long as we are working together toward something, I think I can get over those feelings.

So don't worry, Onii-chan.

...How about that? I can already write modern Japanese like this pretty well, huh? Hee hee, sometimes I even impress myself. Onii-chan, praise me! Tell me "You're amazing, Kuroha!"

? ? ?

What in the world is this? I recognized the symbol part, but with so many kanji in the text itself, I had no idea what it was saying.

When I lifted my head, a whirlwind suddenly blew and the paper disappeared from my hand. Kuroha at my side had turned such a shade of red that it caused me to suddenly consider studying the circulatory system. She stuffed the paper she had snatched into her skirt pocket at an unreasonable speed.

"Y-Y-Y-Y-Y-Y-Y-You saw it, didn't you?"

"Yeah."

"Y-Y-Y-Y-Y-Y-Y-You read it, didn't you?"

"Yeah."

Kuroha collapsed to her knees and buried her head in her hands. When I tried to call out to her, she screamed, "F-Forget everything! Delete it all from your mind! Pleeease!"

"I read it, but there's no way I was able to understand any of it. Stop and think about it."

"...huh?" Kuroha raised her head, and stayed that way with her mouth half

open for a few seconds, then exploded. “Then don’t tell me you read it, damn it! That’s just confusing! You idiot! You big idiot! You’re gonna die from stupidity! Just die already!!!” She started swinging her dictionary at me.

Man, what’s gotten into her?

“See if I care!” Kuroha turned her back to me and sat down on the ground. She was pressing her hands to her cheeks and groaning, “Aaaah...” and, “Ugghhh...”

There must have been something damn embarrassing written on that paper, huh? In orthodox literature, the most famous situations for embarrassment were wetting your pants or wetting the bed, so it was probably about one of those.

“Kuroha, make sure to wash anything that got dirty, okay?” I said.

“W-What?” she burst out.

You’re a big girl now, so if you Ammoni Ah’d something, admit it already!

I decided it was best to leave her be for now. As I got some distance, I made eye contact with Yuzu-san, who had been watching over us.

Oh yeah, I have something I want to say to her.

If, like Kuroha was worried about, the future didn’t change back to the way it was, I had decided I wouldn’t give up on my dream. But there was still one thing that I would regret. I wouldn’t be able to bring back Yuzu-san’s feelings.

“Yuzu-san, I promised to take back *Ani MAJI Mania* and return the future to the *Oniaka* route. But if, in the end, it doesn’t go back...” I had already been unable to keep the promise I made to her to fulfill her brother’s will. “If I break this promise too, you’ll probably be so disappointed you’ll give up on me. So, if you want to stay here in the 21st century, just ask, and...”

Before I could finish my sentence, Yuzu-san yelled at me. “Gin-san, what are you saying?!” She looked angry. “I’m going to the 23rd century with you, got it? No matter what future it ends up being.”

“You’ll come with me?”

“You don’t understand me at all, Gin-san. If you say anything like leaving me behind again, I... I won’t forgive you.” As Yuzu-san said this, she reached out her

hand and gently pinched my cheek.

For a moment I didn't realize what had happened and I just stood there, stunned.

Yuzu-san laughed gently. "That's your punishment."

"O-Okay..." My heart and my cheek burned with passion. *So you'll stay by my side, Yuzu-san? Thank you. Thank you so much...*

I gathered my thoughts. The feelings that Yuzu-san had put into *Ani MAJI Mania* had turned into *Oniaka*. I had read that *Oniaka* and it had healed my young heart, which had led me to my dream of becoming an author.

It's like I've been protected by and guided by Yuzu-san for my entire life...

"Hey, brat!" Just when I was being embraced by warm feelings, Mr. Bedhead's word knocked me out of it. "You don't actually think you're going to win this thing, do you?" He was still barking his head off. But I remembered then I had something I wanted to tell him.

"Mr. Bedhead, and I'm being completely serious here, if the future goes back to the culture it used to be, I'll lend you some orthodox literature that I recommend."

"Like I'm trying to say, the future you want is not coming back!" he shouted.

"But in return, would you lend me some modern literature books that you recommend? Like the books by Torahiko Touji. I can't read them, but Kuroha can explain them to me."

"What?" He stared me back in the eye. He looked at me sullenly, "Hmph. You think your sister can read kanji, yes?"

"I do. And?"

"...You can't read them."

"Huh?" *I'm someone from the 23rd century, so I thought that was pretty obvious?* Mr. Bedhead didn't say anything further.

"Now then, why are we standing around here talking? Let's hurry up and get back the manuscript and the Meguri Gun so we can return to Yuzu-kun's house

without delay.” Odaira-sensei pointed out in the distance, where we could see a red torii gate out in the shadow of the setting sun.

Whoa, it’s a real torii!

When we returned to Yuzu-san’s house, we would put both *Ani MAJI Mania* and Mr. Bedhead’s *The 21st Century* in her treasure box. It might cause Gura to write *Oniaka*, or the effect of *The 21st Century* could cause him to write something different. It could be *Seishin* or even some other work we’d never seen before. Whichever work that Gura presented should have a great influence on the culture of the entire world.

What will happen to the 23rd century?

It was possible that the culture could change into something completely unrecognizable. Just thinking about it made me uneasy. I had told Kuroha something cool like, “I’ll accept it, no matter what happens,” but imagining a world without *Oniaka* or the orthodox style made my heart hurt.

I was afraid to know the result.

But it was a decision we had all made together. There was no going back on it now. We had to entrust everything to the god named Kurona Gura. In just a little while, we would know his judgment.

*

On a certain day in the 23rd century, in Kuroha’s room...

“Kuroha, tomorrow is finally the day I get to meet Odaira-sensei for the first time! I’m so excited, I can’t get to sleep!”

“...How many times do I have to tell you not to barge into my room if you’re trying to go to sleep?” she complained.

“Here’s this month’s *Literary Gal*,” I said. “There’s an article where Odaira-sensei and Haruka-sensei debate.”

“Fine, fine... I just have to read it with you, right?”

Special Issue! *Literary Gal* May 2202

“Debate Special *Gimai* Gai Odaira vs. *Jitsumai* Haruka Haruka — The Future of Literature”

Interviewer: It’s been almost 10 years since you, the two great masters of Little Sister Literature, have debated.

Haruka: You’re still alive. You *gimai* bastard should have kicked it long ago.

Odaira: Nice to see you, too. I thought you might have mellowed out a bit, but I guess that’s not the case.

Haruka: Of course not! I will never accept your non-blood related little sisters! Down with *gimai*!

Odaira: It’s thanks to blood-related little sister fanatics, *e.g. jitsumai* fundamentalists like you, that we’ve seen such an increase in story heroines that are *gimai*, you know!

Interviewer: Well, the fireworks have stared early, haven’t they? Our topic today will be “The Future of Literature,” and so I’d like both of you to discuss your feelings on the direction that literature is going.

Haruka: The future of literature? As long as it has little sisters, that’s fine with me. Okay, that’s a wrap.

Odaira: Indeed. We may have our differences about *gimai*, but when it comes to our feelings that little sisters are the pinnacle, on that we agree.

Interviewer: Within the orthodox style there are other genres beyond little sister, such as older sister or childhood friend... And lately there’s been a slight boom in the “commando” sub-genre where the heroine doesn’t wear any panties at all...

Odaira: Listen, you. You *do* realize to whom you are speaking such a thing, yes? I am Gai Odaira! I basically coined the phase, “Without panties, there is no literature.”

Haruka: When the heroine tosses her panties into the washing machine, the main character is now in the machine itself. *That* is orthodox literature. Panties are fundamental.

Odaira: It pains me to say it, but on that matter, Haruka-kun and I are in complete agreement. For me, the main character resides in the washing machine, the dryer, the chest of drawers... Wherever there are panties, therein lies literature! Those are the kind of books I wish to write.

Haruka: Panties are the soul.

Odaira: After all, the way that an author writes about panties reflects their talents more than anything else. The way I write them and the way that Haruka-kun writes them are completely different. It would not be an overstatement to say that a book without panties would be an abandonment of the art of writing itself.

Haruka: Young authors these days are all trying so hard to be original that they forget the fundamentals. Without those fundamentals, you will never break new ground.

Odaira: That's right. Even though the two of us have fought so much about *gimai* and *jitsumai*, when we were young, we both strove for the same thing.

Interviewer: To strengthen your prose?

Odaira: You really have no idea, do you? Before you get to prose, you have to experience it, yes? First, you go to a women's underwear store. For an entire day you observe the wares in the shop. You take their fabric in your hands, and memorize their patterns.

Haruka: You get warned by the employees. You argue with them.

Odaira: You run away.

Haruka: The next day, you're finally reported to the police.

Odaira: It's only through this kind of blood, sweat, and tears that you can truly get the experience you need to be an author.

Haruka: That's why you'll find orthodox style literature authors hanging around lingerie shops, you see.

Interviewer: It's rare for you two to be so agreeable.

Haruka: Oh, pardon me. This *gimai* bastard should have kicked it long ago.

Odaira: Here we go again... You really should be more tolerant of others.

“Honestly, I don’t see where Odaira-sensei gets off throwing around words like ‘tolerant’,” said Kuroha. “He’s hardly tolerant at all! I believe that books can be literature without showing us any panties.”

“What are you saying?!” I replied in disbelief. “Didn’t you read what the authors in the debate just said? Panties are what makes it orthodox style! Without panty flashes, there *is* no current-day literature!”

“Fine, then what should someone do who prefers literature that doesn’t have panty flashes?” she asked.

“How should I know? I mean, there’s always modern Japanese literature, but when it comes to current-day, there’s no point in reading or writing books like that.”

“Sheesh, Onii-chan! You’d better not get even more stubborn after meeting with Odaira-sensei.”

“I can’t neglect my own studies of the patterns and prints of panties, either! So I’ll just make use of your dresser right here, and...”

“Wha?!”

“Wait, never mind,” I said. “I forgot that all your panties are just plain white. There’s no variation.”

“...”

“Oh? Why have you raised up your arm so high?”

“Arm exercises. In a second I’m going to lay down the hammer on your head.”

Chapter 6 - The Future — FUTURE — ☆※□

I was sitting in my classroom in the 23rd century. It was just how I remembered class having been.

Sugawara-kun had gotten a question wrong and was in the process of being consoled by three postcards (his girlfriends). It seems that Sugawara-kun had finally graduated from two-timing to three-timing, and the morning bloodbath was quite a sight to see. In order to properly act out being hit by his girlfriend, he had gotten one of his classmates to give him a straight punch. I envied Sugawara-kun's strength of will.

I turned my gaze back to my own desk. An anime character that resembled Homyura was on the display on my desk. It was our teacher, Kazoe-sensei.

"Next is Art," she said.

After her announcement, the screen changed to an illustration of a pretty girl. I could really feel the history and traditional culture emanating from the old-fashioned anime picture.

"This is a poster for a visual novel that was published in the Heisei era." Kazoe-sensei gestured to the girl's head with her pointer. "Here you can see a unique characteristic of illustrations from the period, known as the 'ahoge'..."

The girl's hair was cut into a short bob, but a single clump of hair was sticking out of the top of her head like a stalk of rice. This hair sticking up used to be called an *ahoge* long ago.

"I want you to give me the answer why people of that time period would draw characters with this *ahoge*," directed Kazoe-sensei.

This is a toughy... I knew that there must be some kind of deep meaning behind the *ahoge*, but I could not for the life of me come up with an idea. *I suppose I just have to guess...*

"To show their rebellious nature?" I was sure this had to be wrong.

But a giant “BINGO!” came up on the display.

What?! I was just grasping at straws, and I managed to get it right? I’m so lucky!

The screen changed to show a pretty girl in a mini skirt. A sudden breeze blew up her skirt, and I was blessed with the sight of a pair of panties with a blue border.

“Not bad, for you,” Kazoe-sensei told me. “The *ahoge* was a secret symbol by artists who were protesting the raising of the consumption tax. The hair standing on end was showing their anger, see. A single *ahoge* meant ‘A consumption tax of 1% is plenty!’”

I see! I had no idea! To think that illustrations of pretty girls could hold such deep meaning.

“That *is* what you meant by your answer earlier, right?” asked Kazoe-sensei suspiciously.

“U-Uh... Y-Yes, it was.” *I’m sorry, that wasn’t what I was thinking at all!*

Even if it was a fluke, I was thankful for getting the question right, and I could feel the tension drain from my face.

“Why are you making such a creepy smile? Oh I get it... Those reward panties weren’t enough for you, huh? Idiot! Suit yourself!” Kazoe-sensei got huffy and disappeared.

Even after a little while, she didn’t return to the screen. *Um... I can’t continue class like this, you know...* I knew it was all part of her programming, but I wish I could do something about it. *Man...*

It’s true I was a little annoyed, but... I really was grateful to be able to take classes from Kazoe-sensei again. Because, you see...

...the world of the 23rd century had returned to the *Oniaka* culture.

On our way home from school, we all stopped at a hamburger place in the area in front of the station. Myself, Kuroha, Yuzu-san, and the professor were all sitting at a table on a terrace outside.

The hamburger place’s logo was a giant “M,” and it was a famous, traditional

Japanese restaurant with a long history dating back to the Showa era. It would seem at a glance not to be the type of place for a bunch of high schoolers to eat, but we had all decided that it was good to get a taste of traditional culture and history once in a while.

Yuzu-san had the hamburger sitting in front of her, but she seemed to be at a loss.

“What’s the matter?” I asked.

“This is the first time I’ve ever had a hamburger. Do you eat them with chopsticks?”

“You eat them by holding it in your hands.”

“Oh, so you hold it in your hands! That’s surprising. I suppose this is another thing I’ll just have to get used to here in the future,” she said.

“No, I’m pretty sure they were eaten the same way back in the 21st century, actually,” chimed in Kuroha.

After returning with us back to the 23rd century again, Yuzu-san had starting living at our house. I was prepared to have to convince my parents to accept the idea, but they’d said it was fine without any resistance.

Sitting next to Yuzu-san was the professor, who was sipping cola through a straw. We’d become friends with her, and had hung out a number of times after we’d returned to the 23rd century. She was the same age as Kuroha and Yuzu-san, so they hit if off quite easily.

“It’s all thanks to Kurona Gura that we can hang out together like this,” remarked Kuroha, looking deep in thought. “You and Odaira-sensei predicted that Gura would choose *Ani MAJI Mania* over the other book. Although in the end, it was just a bet.”

“Yeah. Actually he whispered to me that considering Gura’s tastes, he would probably choose *Ani MAJI Mania* over my brother’s book-noda,” replied the professor.

“I guess Gura really had a maiden’s heart,” I agreed.

“It wasn’t just *Oniaka*,” the professor explained. “Even in *Seishin*, the

descriptions were evocative of how a girl loves a guy, so that's just the kind of story Gura likes-noda. It was thanks to Odaira-sensei's knowledge of Gura's taste that we had the confidence to take that bet-noda."

Odaira-sensei must have inferred Gura's tastes from his written works.

He never ceases to amaze me.

"So it was a battle we were pretty sure we would win...? I worried all that much for nothing!" complained Kuroha.

Our *Ani MAJI Mania* was a book about a girl in love. But Mr. Bedhead's remake of *The 21st Century* had hardly had any female characters at all. It was that which had made the difference.

I really am grateful to Gura, my god of literature. Despite being so famous, Gura had never showed himself publicly, and the details of his person had been lost to history. *I'm sure he was a great man, of course.*

Yuzu-san had been listening to us quietly, but then she pointed to the large clock outside. "Gin-san, it's 5 o'clock."

"Oh? Is it time already?" I asked. *Oh shoot, I was too absorbed in conversation!* I rushed to take out my cell phone. "Hey, I'd like it if everyone would listen to this."

I fiddled with my phone, and launched the radio tuner app. The voice of a female announcer came through my phone's speaker.

" —This is the *Gai Odaira Hour,* brought to you by Toyoda!"

This was Odaira-sensei's radio program. There were still radio programs in the 23rd century because of how cheap they were to produce.

Most of the radio personalities were 2D characters, but Odaira-sensei was one of the few flesh and blood people that had a show, and it was the best of them all, too! That was just how impressive Odaira-sensei was.

On this week's *Gai Odaira Hour,* he was going to make a very important announcement about his new work.

It's not something I'm going to miss!

“Thank you for the introduction,” a voice said.

It’s Odaira-sensei! Judging from the tone of voice, it seemed he was still a little girl. Odaira-sensei was truly one with the soul of a little girl if he was able to do media appearances as one.

“This week, you are finally going to make that big announcement about your newest work *KIRARIN! PANTYS SKYBLUE*,” the announcer said. “We’re going to hear quite a bit from Odaira-sensei, but before that, we have to go to a short commercial break!”

Man, get to the announcement already!

The commercial was for a new car called the “Maron.” The Maron had a giant illustration of a pretty girl right there on the front of the car, which was pretty common for cars in our time period. The mascot character Maron would talk to you from the control panel inside the car, so you could drive by yourself and not be lonely.

As an aside, cars that had large illustrations of pretty girls on them used to be called *itasha* a very long time ago. It seems that had been some category of art or something.

After the commercial, Odaira-sensei launched into his usual talk about his unending love for little girls. The topic today was “metaphors to describe the young cheeks of little girls,” and he gladly replied, “Marshmaron!” giving a shout out to his show’s sponsor.

“Things have gotten pretty exciting already, but we even have a special guest for this week!” teased Odaira-sensei.

“Yes, we do,” the announcer lady replied.

“It’s the illustrator for *KIRARIN! PANTYS SKYBLUE*...”

Finally, time for the big announcement!

“...Miru Imose-chan!”

She’s on the air!

“Whaaaaaa?!” The second Miru’s name was mentioned, Kuroha let out a yell. “Onii-chan, you seem oddly calm about this... You knew?”

“Yup.”

“Why didn’t you say something to me?!” she shouted.

“Sensei told me to keep it a secret since he was afraid you might be against the idea,” I explained.

“Sheesh... Well at least she has that Meguri Pen that the professor lent her, so he shouldn’t be able to do anything funny, but...”

As Miru entered the recording booth, we could hear the staff applaud. The announcer asked Miru to introduce herself.

“I wonder what Miru will say?” I couldn’t hide my anticipation.

“I’m Miru.” It was quite a simple self-introduction.

“Miru-chan is my friend, see,” Odaira-sensei said proudly. “She is an incredible genius, and I thought right from the start that I wanted her to be the illustrator for my latest work. Miru-chan, do you already have ideas about the illustrations you will draw?”

“All your books are basically the same, geezer. I’ll just draw some pictures that are like the other ones.”

“Miru-chan, don’t say they look the same, say that they are ‘overflowing with traditional beauty’!” Odaira-sensei complained.

“However you want to call it, geezer.”

Miru was clearly not in any mood to play along. *She should be a little happier to be a guest on such a prestigious show!*

“Elementary school aged girls draw little girls all the time, right? I love to watch them draw from behind. An elementary school girl drawing elementary school girls... being watched over by me, in the body of an elementary school girl... Could there be a more blissful trinity?!” Odaira-sensei’s voice rose ever higher from my cellphone.

“ * * * * * * * * * * * !” (* Translator’s note: Improper language has been removed.)

Odaira-sensei had gotten himself so worked up that he had started spouting

words you can't say on the radio one after another, so they had to suspend the program suddenly. This happened quite a bit during Odaira-sensei's show, and there were not a small number of listeners who quite looked forward to it.

The radio program shifted abruptly to an instrumental version of an anime song.

"That's Sensei's show for you! You never know when there might be an 'accident' on air like that," I beamed. "It's quite the thrill. I can't get enough."

"I'm surprised that the show hasn't been canceled, Onii-chan," said Kuroha.

The professor said, "His sponsor Toyoda can't drop him-noda. Odaira-sensei's popularity can't be matched-noda. Since he's in the body of a little girl, he could even work as a 3D idol-noda. For a flesh and blood girl to become an idol is like a miracle-noda!"

The image of Odaira-sensei singing on a glittering stage, his twin-tails waving back in forth, filled my mind...

Whoa, gotta be careful, or I'll totally be entranced!

"Onii-chan, what are you gawking at?" demanded Kuroha.

"Just, I really like girls with blonde hair..."

"Oh, my..." said Yuzu-san, her cheeks flushing. At the same time, Kuroha stared at me with daggers in her eyes.

"Imose-kun, please refrain from saying inappropriate things-noda. What would you do if you got stabbed in some horrible incident-noda?" the professor asked.

"I'm not going to do anything that'd get the police involved, sheesh!" complained Kuroha.

After her admonishment, the professor laughed merrily. "But I didn't say anything about *you* doing it, Kuro-chan!"

"Grr..." Kuroha clamped up like she was angry about something. I felt sorry for her, so I decided to change the subject.

"Speaking of incidents, whatever happened to Mr. Bedhead?" I asked.

"I have not a clue-noda," dismissed the professor.

“You haven’t talked with him?” asked Kuroha.

“Nope-noda.”

Hmm...

“Professor, Sadame-san is your older brother. You should really try to get along,” suggested the ever-so-kind Yuzu-san. To Yuzu-san, who had lost her brother, she truly felt that not getting along with one that was alive would be a terrible shame.

“Me and my brother have different tastes, and we think totally differently-noda. The thing we have in common is that we each go our different way-noda!” The Professor grinned and laughed. “I’m not a good little sister like Kuro-chan or Yuzu-cchi!”

It didn’t seem like the Choumabayashi siblings’ relationship had changed. I was interested to hear how Mr. Bedhead was doing, but judging from the professor’s reaction, I wasn’t going to learn anything from her.

It had been one month since we had returned to the 23rd century, and so it had been one month since Mr. Bedhead had transferred to *that area*.

“I didn’t contact him, but...” The professor pulled out a book from her little pouch. “...all of a sudden I got this sent from my brother. I think he wants me to give it to you, Imose-kun.”

The professor handed me the book. It was Haruka Haruka’s *AFTERSCHOOL LITTLE SISTER CLUB*.

“Wait, that’s the wrong one.”

Torahiko Touji’s *21 CENTURY.*

“That’s... a current-day Japanese edition, isn’t it? Kuroha, was there a current-day edition of Torahiko Touji’s *The 21st Century*?” I asked.

“Not when I read it before, no. Torahiko Touji wasn’t well respected in our time period.”

“Maybe it just came out recently?” I asked.

“Nope, this was published quite a long time ago-noda.” The professor opened

it up to the copyright page. According to the first publication date, it had come out half a century ago. I took the book from the professor and looked through it. The cover illustration was a landscape, and I couldn't find a single insert illustration on the inside.

"No insert illustrations? So it's not a current-day remake, but just a translation into current-day Japanese, then?" I noted.

"It looks a lot like a book from my time period," said Yuzu-san.

"Yes. If you ignore the fact that the prose is in current-day Japanese, it is quite similar to books of the Heisei era," said Kuroha.

"Do you think it was published in *that* area?" I asked.

"I suspect so," she said.

I thought about that place in my mind: the place where Mr. Bedhead had gone.

"Onii-chan, look." Kuroha pointed behind me, snapping me out of my thoughts about that place. I turned around, and the big screen display over the shopping plaza was showing a news program. An anime character was presenting the news.

"Ah!" I exclaimed.

"Perfect timing, that place is on the news right now-noda," the professor said.

We all sat back and watched the news broadcast.

"—we have a live shot. Take a look at the festival atmosphere."

The broadcast shifted to a live shot. We could see what looked a lot like a Heisei era street. No, actually if you looked more closely, it was even more retro. According to Kuroha, it was a mixture of Heisei, Meiji, Taisho, and Showa era styles. There were a ton of signs written in kanji.

The news continued to show the festival. A group of people were carrying a portable shrine, and a group of masked dancers called *shishimai* pranced at the front of the parade.

It was a tradition that should have been long extinct in our time period. I had

never even heard of a *shishimai* outside of a children's anime called, "Cover your face, but not your butt! Shishimai."

"Oh? Look at that!" Yuzu-san had noticed something, and was pointing at the screen. I looked and saw a young man whose spiky hair made him stand out of the crowd.

It was Mr. Bedhead.

"I still can't get over that hairstyle of his. I wonder what his secret is for preserving such an amazing bedhead," I wondered.

Mr. Bedhead had his arms crossed and was taking in the festival with a nasty look on his face.

"God damn him, how can he make such a unhappy face during a festival-noda!" his sister exclaimed.

The camera zoomed right up to Mr. Bedhead. He noticed and turned toward it, and then suddenly bellowed, "Readers, listen clearly! My literary talent will completely uproot the orthodox style! Remember that!"

"Suddenly making a declaration straight toward the camera... That's very like him," said Kuroha with a sigh.

An old woman next to him spoke up, saying, "Your hair's a mess, you know!"

He countered, "This is my LITERARY HAIR!"

He never changes.

After a little while, the shot returned to the news studio. The city that had just been on the news was the "Ariake Special Cultural District."

The genesis for this "Special Cultural District" had gone like this. Kurona Gura had written *I Want to Have Onii-chan's Baby (Oniaka)* after being inspired by *Ani MAJI Mania*. Thanks to that, culture around the world had gone back to being the *Oniaka* culture. However Mr. Bedhead's *The 21st Century* hadn't just vanished into the black hole of time.

Gura had taken the manuscript and shown it to his editor, who had had it published as a book by "An Unknown Author." It hadn't made the kind of impact that *I Want to Have Onii-chan's Baby* had, but it had collected a small following

of true believers.

“It wasn’t my brother’s talent, but the greatness of the original work by our ancestor-noda,” said the professor.

“No, I think your brother’s talent played a role. I could feel his pure passion for the works of your ancestors,” I said.

Mr. Bedhead’s *The 21st Century* was a work filled with nostalgia for the past. It had had a small, but real, effect on Japanese society, and among a certain group gave rise to a strong passion for preserving the culture of the past.

The number of these people who protected the culture of the past had grown each generation, and eventually they’d created their own “Special Cultural District” on the man-made islands in the Tokyo Bay. At first it had been a small encampment, but by the current-day, it was now a designated Tokyo metropolitan ward with a population in the tens of thousands.

You could say that it was a town that had been born from Mr. Bedhead’s passion, so it was only natural that he had gleefully moved there.

“He talks big, but all he ever really wanted was a group of like-minded people to be with-noda!” said the professor.

“I hope he has a good time there in the Special Cultural District. He won’t think of trying to change the world’s culture again like he did the last time,” I said.

I’m glad for you, Mr. Bedhead. The books you write won’t be ignored anymore. At the very least, the people in the Special Cultural District will give you some feedback.

“As for me, I can’t understand what people like about this Special Cultural District, but there are always people every generation who like older stuff-noda,” the professor added.

“And who was it that spent themselves penniless buying vintage items from the Heisei era?” Kuroha needled.

“That’s like, completely different-noda!” yelled back the professor.

“What do you think about the Special Cultural District, Onii-chan?” Kuroha asked me.

“I don’t really care about it, but if there are people that want to preserve the past, why not?” I said. As long as they didn’t try and stop us from doing things here, I had no intention of saying anything against them.

“But you just heard him say he was going to destroy the orthodox style, remember-noda?” the professor said. “You sure that’s okay, Imose-kun-noda?”

“Sure, I’ll take him on! I have to do my best as someone who loves the orthodox style!” I answered.

Odaira-sensei had said to me that something truly amazing might be created out of something that wasn’t mainstream, such as the Special Cultural District. If the orthodox style rested on its laurels, it might lose its place to something else.

“I won’t allow the orthodox style to be destroyed!” I cried.

“Imose-kun, if only you knew...” muttered the professor.

Huh? What was that supposed to mean?

As I gave her a strange look, the professor freaked out a little and started waving her hands up and down by her sides. “Never mind-noda!”

Kuroha overheard our exchange and responded in a worried tone. “But is this really for the best? I mean, it was just a little bit, but we *did* change history.”

Kuroha was a serious person, so she must have wanted to reset the world to precisely how it had been before. Any way you looked at it, this Special Cultural District was an alien addition that had been inserted into our old world.

But...

“I think it is for the best,” I answered. I opened my copy of Torahiko Touji’s *21 CENTURY* and showed it to Kuroha. “Kuroha, think about it. In the original *Oniaka* world, no one appreciated Torahiko Touji, no?”

“If there wasn’t even a current-day edition published, that’s certainly true,” she said.

“And in the *Seishin* world, what do you think?”

“It might have been well known there, perhaps. A lot of books were probably still well known there.”

“I think so, too. But in that world, they all used kanji. So I...”

“You couldn’t read them, Gin-san,” Yuzu-san said, finishing my sentence.

Kuroha continued to look straight at me.

“I think this is the first world where a book by Torahiko Touji has come out that I can actually read,” I explained.

“That’s probably true,” said Kuroha.

“So, what do you think?” I asked.

“I understand what you’re trying to say, Onii-chan. You want me to say that it’s a wonderful thing or something, right? But you’re just overthinking it, Onii-chan.”

“You think?”

“Even if you read it, there’s no way it’d be to your liking,” she added.

“Yeah. I had that feeling just flipping through the pages.”

“Read it properly, sheesh. Otherwise there’s no point to it.”

“True. I might be inspired somehow, you know? And just being able to read it, even if it’s not to my taste... That’s a big deal, don’t you think?”

Kuroha didn’t answer.

“I mean, I bet that all those modern Japanese language books of a certain genre you like are probably coming out with current-day editions.”

“I-I’m not really into those t-type of books...” she stammered.

“Ahaha... when people call me a maniac, I take it as a compliment, but Kuroha doesn’t like it when you talk about her literary tastes-noda. You need a lot of specialized knowledge to really get into the fandoms, see... A healthy thirst for knowledge-noda!”

“It’s good to learn new things,” Yuzu-san chimed in.

“See? Yuzu-san just wrapped up this conversation in a nice little bow!” I cried.

“Enough...” Kuroha let out a sigh, but then made an expression like she was looking off into the distance. “But if you can read them now, I won’t have to

translate and read them to you, Onii-chan...”

“Did you say something?”

“N-No, I d-didn’t say anything.”

“Ah, okay.”

After that, we changed the subject and talked about various unimportant things. A little bit later, the female announcer’s voice suddenly came out from my phone once again.

“We sincerely apologize for the trouble. We will now continue the *Gai Odaira Hour* with ‘A Song Brought to You By Gai Odaira.’”

Odaira-sensei’s show was back on the air, and it was time for the segment where he chooses a song to play.

“Why don’t we have Miru-chan pick a song this week instead of me? Miru-chan, what song would you like?” asked Odaira-sensei.

“‘LILBRIDE.’” The moment Miru said the name of the song it began to play. They must have decided ahead of time.

“LILBRIDE” was the common abbreviation for the song “MAKE LILSIS BRIDE,” which was about an older brother’s love for his little sister. The lyrics were left a bit up to interpretation, but it was thought that the siblings in this song were getting married.

“I can’t believe that Miru-chan would choose a song like this...” said Yuzu-san, looking a little taken aback. “Is she serious about wanting to marry Gin-san? The law is back to the way it was, right?”

In the *Seishin* world the law had changed, making it illegal for non-blood related brothers and sisters to get married, but since the world had gone back to the *Oniaka* route, the law had changed back, too. Ever since, Miru had often proclaimed she would marry me.

Miru was still a child, so I didn’t think that she really understood what marriage was. It just proved how innocent she was.

“When I watch the three of you, I start to think that it’s *my* relationship with my brother that’s the odd one-noda,” said the professor. “With this obvious

brother complex the two of you have, it's starting to screw with my sense of normality-noda."

"I don't have a brother complex. It's just that without me around, Onii-chan is completely useless, so I can't help but stick with him all the time," said Kuroha, responding forcefully to the accusation. The professor just smiled and laughed it off.

After a little while, the second verse of "LILBRIDE" started to play.

"THE FUTURE WILL BE FOR THE TWO OF US... ♪" went the lyrics, as the song started to talk about the future of the pair.

...The future...

Hearing that word made me remember something. I'd been meaning to check with the professor about something for a long time, and now seemed like a good opportunity, so I inquired.

"Did you really go visit the 38th century, Professor?"

"What is... All of a sudden...?!" The professor looked like she had just been punched in the face.

"I've been curious about it for a while, but there just hadn't been a good time to ask," I explained.

If the professor had been telling the truth, then both the orthodox style and modern Japanese literature would all be lumped into the category of "Ancient Literature." Japanese would be entirely in symbols and numbers, and what passed for mainstream literature then would consist of things completely incomprehensible to us in the current-day.

Far in the future — probably long after I was dead — something would fall from the heavens and wipe out the orthodox literature that had taken dominance over all the creatures on the surface like it was nothing at all. For someone who loved the orthodox style, like myself, it was a sad thought.

"So you believed that story, Imose-kun-noda?" the professor said.

"Partially..."

"Well it was just a lie to get my brother to give up, that's all-noda!" she said.

Oh! That's all it was! I was a little surprised, but Kuroha nodded like she'd figured that was the case all along.

"I knew that there was no way that orthodox literature and modern literature could have been lumped into the same category or that Japanese had just devolved into symbols and numbers!" said Kuroha, patting herself on the back.

"No, no... They were treated in the same category, but within that category, there were still some that were considered 'better' or 'worse' than one another-noda. An author from the second half of this century had had such a tremendous impact that he was treated basically like a god and his works were considered mythological legends. If they actually met the person, they'd be surprised at what a normal boy he is, but..."

"....." Kuroha look at the professor incredulously.

"....Ah." The professor had a look on her face that screamed "I just spilled the beans."

"It *is* a lie, right?" asked Kuroha, tentatively.

"O-Of course-noda! I mean come on, a pair of pantyhose is the Prime Minister-noda? That's not how pantyhose are supposed to be used-noda!"

"Are we talking about other uses for stockings? I recommend using old stockings as drain filters in your kitchen sink!" suggested a helpful Yuzu-san.

"Yuzu-san, I also float them in the bath sometimes," I told her. "I call it a 'Hose Petal Bath.'"

"Oh, my..."

Kuroha said with trepidation, "Onii-chan, don't tell me the reason my hosiery goes missing sometimes is..."

"Yeah, I borrow them."

She hit me with her dictionary without even a moment's consideration. It hurt.

It's fine that you're still walking around with a dictionary even after we returned to the 23rd century, but I'm not going to be impressed if that's the way you use it!

“Anyway, my goal wasn’t to travel through time in the first place-noda,” said the professor. “I was trying to travel to a different dimension-noda. I don’t care about the future-noda.”

It seemed like the professor had decided not to create any more marshmallows. She had realized that nothing good would come of it after everything that had happened.

“Nothing is as boring as knowing the future-noda. The future isn’t something to find out about, it’s something to carve open with your own hands-noda!” she added, puffing out her chest with pride.

I guess that’s her policy. Pretty cool!

As I was being impressed, she turned around and muttered to herself.

“...W-well it’s better not to say anything-noda...”

She subtly opened up her little bag and grabbed a single sheet of paper. “I’ll take this with me to my grave-noda.”

When I gave her a suspicious look, the professor looked back at me and quite obviously tried to change the subject, “Oh yes! If it weren’t for *Ani MAJI Mania*, Japan wouldn’t be the country it is today-noda!” Her voice was way too loud and off pitch, like she was clearly doing it on purpose. “In other words, Kuro-chan and Yuzu-cchi gave birth to this world-noda!”

“Now you’re just exaggerating. Things just happened this way,” said Kuroha.

“That’s right. And if I’m going to give birth, I want it to be with a person I love,” added Yuzu-san.

Both of them shook their head no at the professor. She smiled back at them and turned her attention back to me.

“Imose-kun, it’s your turn to give birth to something-noda. In this world, even someone like you who can’t read kanji can spread your wings and fly-noda!”

“Spread my wings and fly?” I said. “That would be pretty awesome.”

“And I’m not gonna lose to you-noda. Literature and invention might be different subjects, but the fundamental urge to create something new is the same-noda. I’ve never felt more inspired than I am now-noda! I’m gonna do my

best, and one day, travel to the world of 2D-noda!” declared the professor, laughing all the way.

I chewed over what she had just said. *Create something, huh? I wonder if I’ll give birth to something amazing someday?*

As I was pondering, a strong gust of wind blew and the piece of paper that the professor had been holding blew away. I saw what was written on it for just a brief moment, but it seemed like it was just covered in symbols... I couldn’t make it out clearly.

With a “Wah!”, the professor chased after the page like a little kid. Kuroha was looking straight at her back the whole time. Or rather, at the piece of paper. She was squinting her eyes quite hard. As I looked at her face from the side, she turned toward me.

“Hey, Onii-chan... Remember that time I said something really embarrassing? It was ‘Stories will transcend time’ or something like that.”

“Oh yeah, that does ring a bell,” I said.

“When I think about it I start to go red, but I really do believe what I said,” continued Kuroha.

“You’re probably right,” I agreed. “Old books are translated so we can read them today, after all.”

“That’s also true, yes,” said Kuroha, who was starting to smile. “But I think that stories will even reach into the future. So...” She looked me straight in the eye. “Do your best, Onii-chan.”

Strange... I feel like I’ve heard that line before...

As I looked back at her, she averted her eyes, looking ever so slightly bashful, and began to chat with Yuzu-san.

I just happened to look at the piece of paper that was blown away.

What is this strange burning I feel in my chest? I was overcome with an odd sensation. I couldn’t explain why I felt the way I did, but I thought to myself, *One day, I’m gonna give birth to something myself.*

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Back then, the fact that we'd changed the future still hadn't really sunk in. I thought that my life hadn't actually changed much at all, but I was wrong.

The slight difference we had created in the world had even changed my own circumstances.

In the year 2202, in summer, I received a letter from a person who should not have existed.

It was from my little sister. My *blood-related* little sister.

Afterword

How has everyone been? Kajii here.

Thanks so much for reading all of my drivel. When it comes to afterwords — actually, any nonfiction prose writing — I feel like I'm really terrible at it (and if you turn it around and tell me then that at least I'm really good at fiction, I'll probably roll my eyes at you), so it's quite a struggle for me to write this afterword, but thankfully I have something to talk about this time!

You see, this series, *My Little Sister Can Read Kanji,* is getting a manga adaptation! Wow! Awesome! Go me!

It's being serialized in Hobby Japan's webcomic magazine, *Comic Dangan* (http://comicdangan.com).

The manga is being made by Hako Hitsuji-sensei, and it's planned to start sometime before the year is over. Please enjoy it together with the original novels. I'm going to look forward to reading it as a normal reader myself.

Changing the subject, in the last pages of this book, there should have been a page that made you go, "What the heck?" Don't worry, there wasn't any mistake, and it has real meaning behind it. I apologize if there are some people who are confused by it.

Now, on to the thank yous!

To H-san and the illustrator Halki Minamura-sensei, as well as to all the staff that were involved, and my family and friends, you have my deepest thanks. This work wouldn't exist if it hadn't been for all your hard work and support. And of course I can't forget to give my greatest appreciation for you, the readers.

In the next volume, I'm going to explore characters and backstory that I haven't touched on yet in volumes 1 and 2. I'll keep praying that I'll get to meet you all again! Bye for now!

October 2011 — Takashi Kajii

In the version of the Man'yoshu used in this volume it was written that it came from the "7th-8th century," but the poem which I selected to use was actually from the 5th century. The date given was just when the Man'yoshu, a collection of poetry, was compiled.

The version of the text of the Man'yoshu and the readings were taken from this book: *Man'yoshu (Part 1)* by Sen'ichi Hisamatsu, Kodansha Gakujutsu Bunko.

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My Little Sister Can Read Kanji: Volume 2

by Takashi Kajii

Translated by Samuel Pinansky Edited by Emily Sorensen

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Ebook edition 1.0: March 2017